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WANDERINGS

A Book of Travel and Reminiscence

RICHARD CURLE

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WANDERINGS

A Book of Travel and Reminiscence

BY

RICHARD CURLE

Author of *Shadows out of the Crowd*, *Life is a Dream*, *The Echo of Voices*, *etc.*

Where lies the land to which the ship would go?
CLOUGH.

LONDON:
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & CO., LTD.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO. 1920

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TO

JOSEPH CONRAD

WHOSE GENIUS AND FRIENDSHIP HAVE GIVEN ME MANY OF MY HAPPIEST HOURS, I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK, WHICH HIS UNFAILING INTEREST AND SYMPATHY HAVE ENCOURAGED ME TO WRITE.

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INTRODUCTION

THE basis of this book is autobiography, but the intention is not really autobiographical, and the five-and-twenty chapters, each complete in itself, into which the work has been divided have been placed purposely in a seemingly haphazard order. They constitute a straightforward record of experiences in an attempt to create various atmospheres and to enunciate occasional opinions, and the few unifying ideas at the root of them can be ascertained by any reader interested in such matters.

Travel is endlessly fascinating, and I am so ardently bitten with the desire of it that I hope to have materials before long for another volume such as this, indeed, for other volumes; yet I see more and more that there is a danger of its developing into a form of intellectual mania. The craving for the new, with its vast reflex of poetic associations, builds about reality a honeycomb of obscure design wherein you may roam from one phantom chamber to another and lose yourself in false visions of the rounded globe. Romance, awaiting continually its consummation, grows exacting as the lust of power, and saps not alone the deeper imaginative gift but that particular, invaluable attitude which is called "Good Europeanism." The mature traveller is a rarer product than is generally supposed,

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and most of us start out too early to attain the correct perspective. For travelling is like reading; it requires, at its best, a critical frame of creative energy in the absorber which is far removed from the vague romanticism of the majority of even discerning people. A truly wise man would, perhaps, travel only in fancy and cling to battered Europe for his redemption. But I am not particularly wise, and I must confess that Europe's voice is growing fainter in my ears, not alone the voice of physical Europe but of the Europe of mental unrest. I have listened too eagerly to the seductive whispers of more outlandish places, to the soothing murmurs of incomplex philosophies, and though I know full well that sadness and disillusion await the voyager and that the loveliest of tropic isles, as the loveliest of women, is safer left hull down upon the horizon, yet I perceive this to be but a counsel of perfection. After all, Europeanism is not the only word in the art of living. Who would not traverse the earth in the cycle of its enchantment? Who would not watch the pageant of strange lands, walk the alien cities, smell the odour of the jungle? Who would not, I say, although the remembered hours and the remembered faces of other days are a tragic reminder of that which has been and shall be no more? But what is the good of argument?—if wandering is in your blood, then wander you must.

Yes, that is true, but I am becoming aware that in ordinary travel satiety is the brother of satisfaction and that behind this book, behind any book of travels I could write, there lies another, a more thrilling and

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exciting book, a wiser book, a book to do away with weariness, *The Book of the Greater Traveller*. From time to time there has risen before me the ghost of its idea, like the whisper of a dim continent, like the gesture of a veiled figure, and momentarily I seem to await that "passage to more than India." In the elimination of the years and the crystallization of the mind one's innermost ideals assume imperceptibly the colour of intense and passionate beliefs, which, like personality, cannot be expounded in a word but emerge as stealthily as the leakage of air in a tube. This fragile core is the one inviolate thing about life, this untold tale whose breath is ever about us. Language is, of course, a ridiculously inadequate medium and all we can hope for is the shadow of a hint, the shadow of a shadow, which hint, as in the reticence of great poetry or the suggested horror of a midnight yarn, is, probably, for each of us if we but knew it the one ultimate satisfaction obtainable without satiety. If all were known all would be forgotten, and desire, which feeds upon frustration, would wither in the heroic spirit. The things really worth finding out deal not with other dimensions or other worlds, deal not even with the wonder of distant seas, but with a something delicate and profound, yet sane and fundamentally simple, lurking in the fabric of our common existence. A something both universal and individual, and probably only complex in so far as the nature of man is, itself, too complex to enfold the balanced truth about happiness. This is the elusive idea that is to "explain all" and solve for ever "the figure in the carpet."

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But can such a book be written and such a spectre laid? I doubt it. Words are the cloak of an immemorial blindness. They have put a seal upon our eyes in the restless subtlety of the lying tongue. Just as to conquer intellectualism you require intellect, so to discover the new road, that, leading to more than India, leads to home, you must traverse the old road of futility. Childe Roland, himself, approached never to a darker tower.

R. C.

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WANDERINGS

I

EARLY SPRING IN DAMASCUS

IN March the stony uplands of Palestine are covered with wild flowers and the barren wilderness blooms again. It is this, together with the Easter celebrations at Jerusalem, that draws travellers hither at a time when the nights are often very cold. Even in Syria, where flowers are scarcer and spring comes late, cyclamen and dark red anemones flourish in the rock-crannies of the hills. You have only to lean out of the window as the train toils into the Lebanon to catch, in its slow ascent, a full and leisured view of all that thrives 'twixt sea-level and snow-line. In the freshness of the morning, before the mist has cleared off the Mediterranean, you run through the long mulberry-groves of the coast, whence, turning inland, you climb steeply and steadily until you reach the summit at 5,000 feet. In this winding ascent you are for ever losing and regaining sight of Beirut. It crouches far, far beneath you, dwindling at each upward and inward bend, till at length it appears but as a handful of dust sprinkled upon a promontory.

Where the snow still lingers by the track the air strikes keen, but once you are over the ridge and have begun to slip downwards towards the wide plateau lying between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon the winter is past and done with. Everything stirs in the reawakened spring. Up the baked, sandy soil of the lower slopes the vineyards straggle and on the green smoothness of the level white farms are dotted thickly

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like mushrooms upon a lawn after a night of rain. And out of the clear sky, in the magnifying atmosphere of the mountains, the sunlight falls upon the valley, all shining beneath its snow-capped peaks. From the aerial altitude of the high passes it seems to extend into the distance, illumined and fresh as the face of immortal youth. Imperishable sight! The train groans, jerks forward, and stops upon the bank of a wayside station. Shrill cries startle the echoes and little boys, scrambling on to the line, hold up to each carriage window flat loaves of Arab bread and hard-boiled eggs stained yellow with the juice of onions.

At Ryak, junction for the north-going railway and half-way halt between Beirut and Damascus, it is proper to turn aside for the night to view the ruins of Ba'albek. They lie but a few miles distant and at their foot a small town straggles alongside of a grove of orchards, which form a rare oasis in the treeless wild. To describe these ruins of Ba'albek were almost vain. They have suffered grievously from the fury of religion and the flight of years. The vile neglect of ages has shattered their vastness and their delicacy, and the gloom of superstition has wrecked their most beautiful memorials. One of the wonders of the world is dead.

The Acropolis is now a mass of huge decay, its courts filled with fragments of masonry and its scroll-work obliterated by time and vandalism. What is left is doubly impressive. In the great Temple of the Sun, devastated though it be, six columns out of fifty-four are upright still, towering exaltedly as a landmark upon the plain. And throughout the whole extent there are occasional secluded corners where the columns, the carved designs, the friezes are so unusually preserved as to keep wakeful for ever a sumptuous memory of the past. Such is the Temple of Bacchus, with nineteen of its forty-six columns intact, and the portal of the Temple, whose ornamented cella has called forth the eloquence of students. But where so

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much has crumbled that which survives seems no bigger than a speck.

You walk through the ruins as through a waste of stone, raised tier upon tier, and expanding in colossal and perfect proportions even in their fallen grandeur. The blocks of which they were built were of unprecedented size. There are individual stones, 1,200 tons in weight (that is what people say, though an ordinary calculation makes me doubt their figures), elevated twenty feet in the outer wall. These were quarried locally, but here, too, are marble pillars from the interior of Egypt, whose transit alone must have been a matter of years. But, when all is said and done, figures can help little towards a picture of Ba'albek. There, by its orchards and running streams, facing the range of the Lebanon, it stands, silent now and deserted, a haunt for lizards and for feeding animals. Shadow of the Past! Who can fathom the minds of these Idolators, these Christians, these Mohammedans who, in turn, possessed and vitalized this Acropolis? The recreating of vanished eras may fascinate but cannot satisfy. Stones, unfortunately, do not yield up their secrets.

In the short twilight I walked, solitary, amidst the darkening groves. The ruins faded and only the blossoming trees glimmered indistinctly above me. The little irrigation-canals were flowing along their earth-channels without a sound. But late at night, at the hour of moonrise, I went out upon the balcony to gaze once more upon Ba'albek and upon the ghostly, far-flung range of the Lebanon. In austerity of classical reserve I have beheld no sight of more thrilling beauty or one further removed from the friendly intimacy of most country scenes.

But to resume the journey to Damascus. . . . For some time after leaving Ryak the view becomes completely uninteresting. You descend gradually through a narrow, stony gulch which remains with you

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up to the border of your goal. For the line, leaving the open, follows the bed of the Barada—the very river that waters Damascus. But suddenly, round a curve, the plain opens before you, white with the blossom of fruit trees and rich with the verdure of a thousand gardens. It is the threshold of the city, and ten minutes later you will be alighting at Beramké, the outskirt-station. Nor is it any too soon, if you have come through from the coast (as is usual) without a break. Nine unpunctual hours for ninety miles deadens every emotion.

Damascus may contain a quarter of a million inhabitants, but they are so packed together that you can go from the east boundary to the west and from the north boundary to the south in quite a short stroll. To encompass the complete city, in truth, were hardly more than a morning's walk, though it would be many mornings before you could visit the hundred and forty villages that cluster around it as bees around their queen. Its streets are narrow, cobbled, and horribly uneven, and they seethe with all the peoples of the nearer East. A perpetual sound of argument, of hammering, of the cries of street-sellers and cab-drivers, of yelping dogs, and of the patter of ten thousand feet, falls upon the ear and blends harmoniously with the barbaric colours and exotic tumultuousness of the town.

And the first impression is as of a great centre of trade, a spacious clearing-house for the inaccessible, famous cities of the interior. Hither come caravans laden with tobacco from Bagdad and silk carpets from Persia. Everywhere is business and the strife of buying and selling. The desire of profit, an hereditary trait, is strongly ingrained in the Damascene. The call of the mart is blatant and the noiseless footfall of age is all but lost for you in the whirl of traffic. Even in the bazaars, where once romance and commerce sat side by side, change is only too visible. The glory has

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departed from them. Rebuilt hygienically since a recent fire, their archaism has been the victim of a sanitary triumph. Where are the snows of yester year? Corrugated iron roofs now shelter those bazaars where, daily, the descendants of Haroun Alraschid, bearded, grave, dressed in lambs'-wool coats, may still, for anything I know, meditate upon the fleeting pleasures of the world. All things pass. . . .

By the populous centre of bazaar-life (the octopus of Oriental cities) stands, in its noonday stillness, the Great Mosque of Damascus. But here, too, transition has been at work. For though its history goes back to long before the time of Mohammed, and though it has actually been a Moslem sanctuary for 1,300 years, yet the present building dates but from the nineties. It, also, has been devoured by fire and the new Mosque has hardly seen twenty summers. And Christians may now tread, with covered feet, where once no Unbeliever would have been allowed. They may step upon the carpets where worshippers are scattered in attitudes of prayer. To Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate, be praise evermore! With what eager reiteration old and young recite the familiar passages, with what surrender they prostrate themselves! The pious ecstasy of Mohammedans is like a whirlwind or a trance. And in this proof of the abiding influence of their religion one can realize unexpectedly the Damascus of a thousand years. Passing out of the Mosque's cool shade into the blinding street, see how the ancient and historic city has risen before you—here, in a green-tiled minaret standing against the sky, there, in a marble court in which a fountain bubbles softly as dew.

But for the visionary Damascus has its awakening. In the strident day, in the heat of close humanity, an odour exhales from it like a fiery breath out of the East. There is something of Asia in this smell, something old, complex, and exhausted. Your mouth is dry with the

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red dust of the rubbish-heaps, your eyes smart from the powdered grits. All unwinking the glare throbs upon the town. In the radiance of the middle hours the mountains have stepped nearer, the earth has contracted into the insignificance of a toy. Without the walls the repose of death seems to have fallen upon every living thing. Even the dogs have stopped prowling and lie with twitching ears in the dry hollows of water-courses or in scoops of sand: only the blue-bottles are still active, buzzing over a decayed morsel of offal. The city, like some stricken monster, breathes out its fumes and guttural noises into the void. And beneath the blazing sun the lane, ashen and shadowless, stretches away into space, losing itself in the groves of the surrounding fruit trees. In the bazaars buying and selling is going on without a halt. The vendors of roasted beans and of cooling drinks are on their rounds, their raucous and persuasive cries following one another with ever more inflated allegory. Donkeys, unheedful of the insults hurled at them by side-tracked passengers, shuffle patiently onwards. An Arab horse-man, with dark face and turban of camel-hair, is riding boldly down the centre of the sheltered street. To-night he sets forth on his long journey to the Yemen—Oh, for the pen of a Doughty to follow him into Arabia Deserta!—but meanwhile he would rest in the shade. Like all children of the desert he is wise in his generation. For the full tide of the Damascus day spares neither man nor beast.

I have said that the area of Damascus is small and this becomes at once apparent if you walk up to the suburb of Salahiyeh and pore upon the city beneath. From the side of that hill you will observe its whole formation. There are but two wings to Da-mascus, the street leading up to Salahiyeh and that of the Meidan which straggles out of the town for about a mile of houses and granaries. And beyond the city ranges the flat and beautiful plain to which Damascus

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is the key. A day's journey to the south-east it loses itself in the salt marshes, but from here, far as eye can reach, there is a sweep of trees and grey foliage. To the east mountains are just visible and behind you (if you could but see it over the shoulder of the hill) Hermon stands white and glittering in the distance. The river Barada, a swift and narrow stream, flows out of the gorge into Damascus only to be carried underground and to emerge again. It is from a neighbouring summit that Mohammed is said to have looked upon the town and to have turned reluctantly from it with these words, "Man can have but one Paradise and my Paradise is fixed above."

Towards evening, when the rays of the sun strike sideways down the mountains, the whole picture glows with pomp. Then does the Damascus of *Eothen* lie before you. Who can wonder that, colour or no, the old lines on Petra have often been applied to Damascus:

> "Match me such marvel, save in Eastern clime,
> A rose-red city half as old as time."

Like one immense fruit-garden the orchards, pale with almond and apricot blossom, open fanways on all sides from the city. The gleaming minarets are hemmed in by this fragrant sea and the brown houses seem, literally, to float from out the engulfing plain. The deepest and most unbroken quiet reigns in these orchards. Goldfinches hop from branch to branch and in the sun-spattered glades gardeners move silently amongst the trees. In their flowing robes, unhurried, stately, appearing and disappearing, they resemble priests officiating at some sylvan rite. The solemn calm is shadowy as is the twilight of a temple. The sun does not pierce beneath the laced and laden boughs, and at the close of day, while yet the city pants, you will shiver in the chill air of March. It is time to go. Out from the Bab Tuma a cavalcade has emerged

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on to the Aleppo highway; the dust of its progress hovers over the road like a signal to the wanderer of the shades. A delightful spot! Soon the peach-blossom will be out and soon, again, the petals will shower around you when spring is over. Yes, it is time to go. But let me wait, if it be but this once, to hear the sunset prayer-call resounding from a hundred minarets. The muezzins' high-pitched drone rolls out across the land and all the gardeners have fallen, as one man, with their faces towards Salvation. Is not this the hour to be abroad, in the mild silence of the dusk? Already a first cool breath is scattering the pungent smells of the Tarik-el-Mustakim. In the orchards night gathers fast. The call to prayer is heard but as an echo in the stillness and the scent of the trees grows stronger as the deep dark falls. Farewell! The hour has struck. I shall see you no more. But in memory you will survive as the real charm of Damascus. For the town, itself, would inevitably pall, as all such towns do, but the orchards of Damascus would remain sweet for ever.

At night-time the city shuts like a book. There is no penetrating behind her latticed windows. The fanatic assurance of Mohammedanism, ignoring your existence, cannot be disturbed: all has vanished as though all were a dream. Where creed and civilization go hand in hand there will you ever meet the unbridgeable. No confidences, no compromises—it is the universal contemptuous voice of the zealot. Yet there is something satisfactory in certitude. Original Sin is more exciting than the Brotherhood of Man, and more probable. You are a dog of a Christian or you are eternally damned. Choose, and pass on! The intellectual scepticism of Egypt has not affected Damascus. Old and vigorous, it thinks and acts as did its forefathers. Its life, unchanging and steadfast, draws its traditional curtain with the stars. Men there are, undoubtedly, who sit in cafés or prowl by airless back-streets, but they bear upon them no hint

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of the secret, deep hum of the great city. What savant from Europe can interpret the East or what poet visualize the night of Oriental places? Still in my brain I hear the murmur, the unbidden, teeming whisper of walled cities. But is it real or is it a delusion? Is there something mysterious about the East or do masks and roofs conceal only the magic emptiness of a myth? Are the Genii dead or do they live for ever?

Externals alter, and in appearance, at least, the fatal West has not battered upon Damascus all in vain. Two cinematograph theatres—this is not a post-war record—and an electric tramway bear witness to the march of progress. And they are patronized. Moreover, is not Damascus the northern terminus of the Hedjaz railway? Yet it is singular to think how even this railway (with its outrageous travesty of the Flying Carpet) but emphasizes the conservatism of the Moslem creed. For it is a line built to carry Pilgrims towards Mecca, in the hope of everlasting life, in the longing to share the promised rewards of a voluptuous paradise.

At the fall of day I sit in a little eating-house devouring a savoury mess which is probably some concealed form of mutton from a fat-tailed sheep. Then will follow a dish of sweet and tinted curds, and presently I will go forth from this den and drink coffee at an outer table, by which a runlet of water trickles endlessly back to its hidden source in the Barada. Very pleasant it is to pass an hour thus. But anon the desire of movement will seize me and I will buy some loaves and ramble about the streets and feed the pariah dogs that swarm in despised abundance throughout this City of the Blessed.

They are curious animals, these dogs, timid, amicable, and insatiably greedy. Estimates put them at 30,000, but it is an exaggeration. There may be 15,000. Go into the street and call "Sûk, Sûk, Sûk!" and they will crowd round you in an instant. For

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they are always hungry and their belly is their god. I don't blame them—uncertain charity and city-refuse can make no great living. Mangy, lame, in the prime of life, toothless puppies or most infirm of dogs, all wag their tails, all wait eagerly for the bread, and all fight for it with the utmost fury. "Sûk" is a potent word in Damascus. Any old sleepy fellow basking in his corner will spring up at its mere whisper, his head sideways, his ears cocked, his whole frame quivering with expectancy. They are a clannish race—like their lamented cousins of Constantinople, who perished lately upon Oxyæa, that islet of the sea of Marmora. The dogs of one street, or of one end of a street even, will not by any means allow the dogs of another to enter, without uproar. But, indeed, unless enticed away by man, they seldom do invade foreign territory. There is no romantic longing for adventure in these dogs, who are, so to speak, the true inheritors of the eighteenth century. "Why," they ask, "should we be so foolish as to stray afield? Have we not found a butcher's shop where occasional tit-bits are forthcoming, and are we not home-lovers who neither wish to travel ourselves nor will permit any invasion of our sacred hearths?" Unanswerable wisdom!

In colonies of a dozen or twenty they have planted themselves over the city and at night-time their curled-up bodies occupy every nook and gateway. And the more retired their position the safer. For the passing Faithful spurn them with their boots. It is an unclean animal and unworthy of notice. But when a man falls sick he will often order bread to be thrown to the dogs in the hope that his kindness may be recorded above. As to disinterested charity, I suspect there is little of it. A Mohammedan will not even touch a dog, much less make a companion of one. But all the same—witness the clamour at the Golden Horn—there is a kind of generic affection for them, the result, maybe, of long familiarity. And, really, it is an engaging breed, this

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of Damascus, callous and self-centred, of course, but very entertaining and full of an agreeable amiability. Peace be with them! Peace, do I say? I must have forgotten how only yesterday, when they all started howling in the middle of the night, I called down anything but peace upon them. But my anger has evaporated. Perhaps it was an evil conscience that aroused their lamentations. For I have discovered that in their lives there are certain shameful secrets. Go outside the precincts of the town and you will frequently perceive manifestly guilty dogs that slink away from you as they lick their chops. Call "Sûk" to such animals and they will run only the faster; they scent the Day of Judgment. And yet they must live, and by eating carcases they justify their existence. So do not flee from me, O outcast dogs, but gorge to your fill upon this fair and luscious camel! And, truly, these scandalous ones are the only ones that do get their fill. Sleek, yawning, and contented, they laze away the afternoon in satiated revelry. The dumping-ground has many a distinguished adherent. So again, and finally, peace be with them all. . . .

The nights of early spring are bitterly cold in Damascus and you are thankful to pile on the blankets. But towards morning it generally becomes warmer (strange anomaly) and at eight o'clock you can sit up quite comfortably in bed for breakfast. My window overlooked the Barada, hurrying to its underground fate a hundred yards further on, and from it I used to watch the crowd demonstrating before the Governor's Palace at the high price of flour. It is a perennial occurrence. The inhabitants of Damascus are subject to waves of intense agitation, rising and subsiding in them like an angry storm that comes whence and goes whither no man can say. But the moods of any crowd are incalculable and I would do better to speak of individuals. The particularly low type of Damascene Jew I leave out of account as also the Mohammedan

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Arab, who is an unknown quantity. Jews I certainly do understand more or less, but how am I to understand Mohammedans? Arabian is the least introspective of literatures and in this, as in other things, has been the model for our romancers on the Near East and Persia, for our Moriers, Beckfords, and Merediths. A fantastic and roguish charm lights up, at once, the originals and the copies, but it is the charm of the outward. (Pickthall's novels are the nearest approach to an exception.) Man remains tantalizingly unseen, a dummy covered with rainbow emotions, a shadow on the gorgeous foreground of the Orient. In other words, psychology has been sacrificed to colour, which, intentions apart, is rather like judging the orders of Natural History from external resemblances alone. Our travel books, too, but dissect the Arab character in terms of its own obscurity, and do not really aid us. But I cannot help thinking that the Arab mind is capable of a more intimate elucidation. No one, surely, would deny that the basic human emotions are common to mankind, and though only an idiot would carry such an argument to extreme, yet, perhaps, it is no more foolish than to repeat with Kipling, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." There are, of course, prodigious temperamental differences in the attitude towards life, but may not these differences, themselves, be as much the accentuation of universal passions as the outcome of national traits? The question is, Could we not so combine the Eastern colour with the Western introspection as to make us see the Arab as he is, not alone in his group mind, but in his individual?

Yes, I leave the Mohammedan and the Jew out of account. The Syrian Christian offers a better field. Intelligent and artful, an unlooked-for sentiment is liable to hinder his commercial instincts. I knew a man, partner in a puissant firm of merchants, with branches in Cairo, Beirut, and Jerusalem, who rose at

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four every morning to write essays upon "Family Happiness." Yet this man, with the soul of a poet, had a pathetic longing to sell me some embroidered aprons. To and fro swung the pendulum of his conversation. Now he discoursed eloquently of his heroes, La Bruyère and Pushkin, now he implored me, with tears in his eyes, to note the cheapness of the price. I would note it without enthusiasm, but he would only smile—he had slipped back into the Ideal. A remarkable person! I got to know him quite well and much preferred him to the Frenchmen of the tobacco company or the tourists at the hotel of the old Austrian. His red hair gave him a sort of European look but his particular form of Levantine Christianity, as expounded for my benefit, was as Eastern as Mohammedanism itself. Has his share of the family fortune, I wonder, disappeared by now under the guise of taxation? I hope not. It would be a calamity hardly to be compensated for by a whole library of volumes on family happiness.

But Damascus, after all, is essentially a town of Mohammedans. The Christian and Jewish quarters, unlike those of Beirut and Bagdad respectively, are of small importance. They lie, these noisome burrows, on either side of the Street called Straight near its end by the Bab Tuma, and about them their inhabitants creep like hunted animals. For their hatred of the Mussulmans is returned to them fourfold and with an inveterate contempt which would be galling to more educated races. But there is now little or no active interference with the Unbelievers. The outbreak of 1860 had an unfortunate termination and latterly the Positivists at Constantinople had no sympathy with religious fanaticism divorced from political significance. They would have stood no nonsense here where, notoriously, all varieties of belief unite in detestation of the Turk.

In Damascus there are Roman remains and some of

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the landmarks of Islam are very old. But, at its best, the age of Mohammedanism is but a breath. The Pyramids of Egypt were hoary thousands of years before the Hegira and Christianity, itself, was already an established religion at the birth of Mohammed. Oddly enough, the most excellent private example of an antique dwelling belongs to a family of Jews, who are probably more careful of it (it attracts visitors) than most Mohammedans would be. Indeed, the Faithful are not touched by our ardour of preservation. They care for their souls and for the good things of this world, but they are neither artists nor archæologists. The well-known Damascene work is crudely garish and of a type that admits of no originality. The gold and copper hammerings, the inlaying of tables in mother-of-pearl, rare woods, and camel bone follow conventional and uninspired patterns. The dwellings, built on an unconsciously historic plan, have only to crumble to be replaced by the cheap utilitarianism of the West. And yet, in spite of all, the Oriental spirit still tarries within Damascus. In the dim byways, in the warrens of this tortuous labyrinth, there has been little mutation for centuries. The electric tram, the railway, the cinematograph have only scratched this fringe of the changeless East. The ancient buildings may decay and a European veneer may slightly transform the outer life, but beneath it the soul is the same as of yore. Does not the very name of Damascus conjure up the glamour of the *Arabian Nights?* In the story of "Noureddin Ali of Damascus and the Damsel Sitt el Milah" Abou Nuwas exclaims rapturously, "Damascus is all gardens for the pleasance of the eyes." And that is not a story of yesterday. As it was then, so is it now. Its fame is no gourd-like growth but even the fame of the oldest city on earth. The ground that Paul trod and where Saladin lies buried felt also the feet of the Roman conquerors. And now, at length, after its long Turkish subjection,

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it looks as if it might outlast the celebrated cities of Europe. For the disintegrating influences of modern unrest do but ruffle its surface, and presently, in the twilight of obscurantism, it will slumber again. Let the Turks only depart without successors and we will hear no more of Occidental Civilization. By the help of Allah and the Prophet the True Believers will stamp it out.

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II

JAMAICAN DAYS AND NIGHTS

MY first sight of Jamaica comes back to me now as fresh and enchanting as on that summer afternoon of 1902 when, straight from England, I stared at it in delight and felt that here one might live for ever in the fullness of romance and wonder. Without an effort, in the mere resting of my thoughts, I see again the distant outline, faint and serrated, hanging between the blues of sky and ocean, I see the vivid islets off Port Royal spring up shining out of the deep, I see Kingston across the bay, green and white upon its tropic shore. We had skirted the island, coming from the west, and it had taken form slowly before my entranced gaze. The sea was calm, with a ripple upon its surface, and inshore the colours flamed and sank upon the shoals like the changing tints of an opal. In that pure and intense air everything stood forth distinct, bright, without a shadow. A sense of lasting repose hung over the land. The very throng upon the quay, gesticulating with raised arms, seemed, for an instant, motionless in the blinding sunshine, as though caught unawares by a magic and fatal spell. In the stillness of that illusion Jamaica rose before me, like a vision from the sea, like a phantom island of eternal rest. But all at once there appeared to break over the scene a shiver of movement. Faint cries resounded from the shore, palms waved, negroes dived into the water, and above the town vultures swept in widening circles. Slowly we pounded up the bay. I saw the blue of the hills melt into a vegetation that topped their summits, and upon the wharf, where Europeans stalked majestically amidst the blacks, every face seemed to detach itself

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and stand forth with straining eyes. The steamer trembled as, with reversed propellers, she lashed like a dying whale; then, stopping at a signal, she edged gracefully alongside the jetty. An official of the company all in white, with a white topé, hailed the captain in a loud and confident voice and over the peaceful quiet of the ship there echoed the din and bustle of a finished journey.

I landed. It was the hottest hour of the afternoon when vitality droops and the sluggard minutes draw themselves out like the nemesis of an evil dream. Kingston lay dusty and slumbrous in the glare, full of buzzing flies and with its green jalousies all closed upon its white and pinkish walls. It was the worst time I could have chosen, but it made no difference to me. I felt the glorious breath of the Tropics, that secret delirium which nothing can recall and which exists, perhaps, only for such as are under twenty. I felt it, and it was enough—it was perfection. I looked about me with the eyes of a faith that might have moved mountains. I trod those streets as though they were the streets of Kerbela and I a Persian; and now, in memory, I tread them again and, in the conjuration of the past, taste once more the savour of my youth.

We hailed a cab (there were three of us) and drove out to Constant Springs, keeping level with the line of the electric tramway which skirted the high-road, edged by jungle, by savannah, or by clearings where brown huts nestled beneath spreading mango trees and a few banana-palms frilled away into the forest. In that cloudless afternoon, beyond the fetid atmosphere of the city, the fragrance of the isle descended like an invisible rain. Vistas of dry water-courses gleamed in the distance and the warm banks threw their sun-baked reflection at us as we traversed the protecting gloom of overhanging boughs. If even in later years I have never been able to make this five-mile run without a feeling of adventure, what was it to me

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then in the sunshine of my discovery! Strange birds fluttered from the road and a scarlet flamboyant-tree, incredibly splendid in the sombre wood, reared itself like a shaft of fire. This, indeed, was the Garden of the World! The very pineapple patches in the dry brakes sang to me of the warm South. We overtook negroes ambling homewards, carrying on their heads empty baskets or crates of fowls that had found no purchaser. They chattered as they swung along on their bare feet, good-natured, grinning, like children released from school. We hailed them and they hailed us back and so, smiling through that smiling land, we sped forward to our journey's end.

The hotel, crouching beneath the hills, appeared suddenly round a corner of the road. We jumped out and approaching it by a flowering archway entered the hall. It was cool in there with the coolness of artificial dark. Splashes of light chequered the tessellated floor and played on the walls like the reflection of dancing water. We ordered tea. When we emerged again the light had sensibly decreased; the dusk had fallen swiftly and a pellucid glow was suffused throughout the sky. I strolled down to the fish-pond and sat upon its stone balustrade. In tree and grass the cicadas had begun to chirrup and in hidden reeds the frogs were croaking in a very ecstasy of abandonment. The stir of the advancing night sighed over the earth. (Ah, these tropic nights with their promise and mystery all vanishing in the pale dawn!). New smells filled the air and in the twilight of the island a breeze floated up from the sea and dimpled the water of the pond. The sky was changing and towards the east a star or two came lingeringly out. Lizards were running over the stone or pausing, with head erect, as though to sniff the wind, while, above, in the high trees, vultures were going to roost with the fussy inanity of hens. In the maze of branches, the fireflies flitted to and fro like comets entering the dark or

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lighted zones of the heaven. The day was over and the hurrying night began to envelop all the silhouette of the mountains in one black erasure. Lamps shone in the hall and moths, like uneasy spirits, floundered in at the door or crept upon the walls with vibrating wings. All was hushed save those sounds which are themselves the silence of the forest, just as the silence of a room is shown in the audible beating of a heart. And in the clamour of the wild a stillness stole upon me there, and at that instant of harmony the voices of the night seemed no more than the throbbing of one enormous artery. Alone and triumphant I sat amidst the aromatic gloom. Oh, endless pathetic fallacy!

My companions had remained upon the verandah and, on rejoining them, it occurred to us to go and have a swim. In the renewed and sheltered water of that indoor bath we threw off the grime of day in a cool plunge. Nothing like that in the Tropics as a forerunner of dinner! The bell rang and all-refreshed we went in to our meal, served us by the perspiring hands of white-uniformed negro waiters. Around the door the croton bushes stood like mustered sentinels and through the open French windows the whisper of the night was stealing incessantly. The breeze had died away and in the sultry air a shower of insects beat upon the lamps. On all sides people were discussing their usual affairs; island-gossip mingled with the talk of travellers. The negroes, gravely proper in their tight boots, served in silence, spreading through the room that singular odour which is as perceptible to European senses as is ours to African. In the familiar strangeness of the scene, with the background of the night as a setting to this picture of civilized decorum, I felt as elated as at the glimpse of a railway passing through a waste. The fringes of the wilderness are exciting because in the meeting of opposites there lurks one of the great essences of romance. For what

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is romance without contrast and without the sense of the unspoken word?

We finished at length and, going out once more, I sauntered down to the road. A tram passed, clanging townwards, and its trail of sparks left the highway deserted. But presently a negro came silently out of the murk, went by me without a word, and disappeared beyond. Spouting noises filled the air. In the village where the tramway had its terminus a few lights glittered, dull and red in the close heat. Lassitude rested upon the earth. After walking up and down for an hour I began to feel sleepy and went indoors. All was still. I climbed up to my room and stepped out upon the balcony: before me the semicircle of the hills rose against the sky and the stars were shining in the vast and brilliant multitudes of a tropical night. The flares in the village were being extinguished one by one and, at my back, fireflies threaded the dusk of my unlit chamber. The myriad voices, muffled and drowsy from below, resembled up there the purring of a tide or the rustle of autumn leaves. Slowly, as though under the influence of a narcotic, I undressed and, getting into bed, pulled the mosquito-curtain about me and shut my eyes. Is this dream-like sensation the meeting-ground of sleep or do my thoughts but pulse as I lie here wide awake? A melodious music echoes in my ears; I try to ask myself what it is, and—I sleep. . . . Such is my first recollection of Jamaica.

Yes, such is my first recollection. And I trust that in giving it I do not appear other than what I am. I am no mystic, no poet, and am not even given to the slightly distracted moods of Mr. Snodgrass. But, in memory, the images of youth are apt to assume a kind of didactic tendency, the result merely of the futility of words or of selection. It has nothing to do with life which, fortunately, is sufficient for itself—especially at nineteen. I have always believed in thinking very

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much as other people think about most things, for therein lies the only sane view of existence. At least, that is my opinion. On this common foundation each can build for himself his own secret hopes, desires, and regrets. And mine are rather simple. I was romantic, I am, perhaps, romantic still, but my romance clings to the solidity of the earth and grows cold in the fanatic isolation of dreamers and prophets. . . . Excuse this interruption.

The next day we left for South America and it was on the return from that expedition that I saw the island again. That, too, was a flying visit and is all of one piece with my first, being divided from it only by a space of time. There is little to be said that I have not said before. But I recall our tea upon the balcony of the Myrtle Bank in Kingston, where the breeze comes off the bay in a delicious unrest and palms wave in the garden below, and I recall how, later, I clambered to the top of the tower at Constant Springs and gazed upon the curving sea and upon the wide plain opening past Spanish Town towards the west. It was the moment when the bloom of evening has fallen purple and red upon the land, when distance is reduced, and when everything awaits in expectancy the oncome of night. And I felt in myself that deep content, that sense of perfect well-being which is the happiest of all emotions. We had arranged to have an early breakfast, as we had to be on board by ten, but I never awoke. I was sleeping in a dreamless innocence, in that weariness which is not really weariness but the languor of fullest health, when someone came running up to tell me that our party were already leaving. I leapt out of bed, flung on my clothes, and darted from the hotel. There are pictures, casual and unimportant, that remain fixed for ever in the mind. And what I saw then is one of them. I saw the road stretching before me, dappled with morning sunlight beneath the trees, with our carriage halted in the

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distance, and nearer by one of my companions turned towards me and beckoning. In its frame of blue sky and green leaves that picture takes on for me the glow of a great master. I had rushed from sleep into the day, and perhaps I view it still in the tender strangeness of a waking vision. Perhaps . . .

It must have been about six years later that I made my third visit. I had come out again simply to see the Jamaica I had only glimpsed—a rash proceeding, because, in the scheme of our universe, disillusionment waits on the idealist. And it was not the same, although I had foolishly supposed it would be: in my dreams the irridiscence of memory shone jewel-like upon it. No, it was not the same, but it was wonderful enough. It was winter when I landed, but the Jamaican winter is only less tropical than the Jamaican June. Constant Springs was crowded with visitors and a varied life thronged the hall. Parties could be seen starting for excursions or returning from mountain rides. Everybody knew everybody else and an undercurrent of malicious small talk ran through the general atmosphere of friendship and gaiety. Bees hummed over the meadows and old ladies gossiped beneath the trellis-work. And at night the music of a waltz flowed out, heard far off upon the hem of the forest and toning with the mutter of the dark. Sirius hung near the horizon and couples, who had come forth to watch the turkey-buzzards squabbling in the branches, would pause for an instant to point it out and to search for the Southern Cross.

It was a joyous existence. I liked to drive of an evening to the Hope Gardens (pride of Jamaica) where humming-birds hover over the beds of flowers and the smooth lawns spread emerald to the level rays. This is the hour when the brick-red bougainvillæa and the poinsettia bushes burn as with inward fire, when bats come out, and the hills are lordly against the sky. The park-like solitude, with trees upon the grass and

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ordered plants beside the walks, was like the setting of an English twilight; but in this untroubled home of departing day one felt a peace untinged by sadness, a peace, as it were, of a virgin world where things are not haunted by the ghosts of happenings and farewell. Yes, that was the feeling, but was it founded on the truth? A perusal of, say, Gardner's *History of Jamaica* might suggest a more chastened mood.

With each morning a discussion would arise as to what to do. I remember once deputing myself to visit a lady in the annexe up at the village in reference to a dance we were organizing and of being very much embarrassed at having to carry on my conversation with her behind a screen on the verandah where she was taking a bath; but otherwise I remained rather passive in counsel. What did it matter what one did as long as one could breathe that divine air? I really preferred to sit still, but if one must do something then let us visit before lunch the Kingston market with its infinite smells and its fantastic assortment of island-produce. What a babel of sounds would issue from that crowd, what agony of barter, what jostling, what peals of mirth! I have often considered the psychology of the West Indian negro, which is arresting in its notable contrasts. A negro by himself will sit for hours in the attitude of an ascetic, with dreamy and unseeing eyes, a sight to marvel at; but put a few negroes together and they would chatter and chatter till the crack of doom. Have they the temperament of birds or are they but escaping from themselves? Their sense of humour is contagious and suggests the open and kindly heart, but deep within them is a superstitious dread, a gloomy shadow, of which Obeah is the outward reflection. Obeah! It is the link that binds them to their past. Suppressed by law, by their religious teaching—they are devout Christians though fond of rotation in regard to sects—and by public opinion, it yet holds a fearful fascination over

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their minds. No doubt a constant reinforcement trickles in from Haiti, but the soil is only too fertile. If the Jamaican blacks were left alone for a hundred years, as the Haitians have been, should we not witness a similar reversion to primeval instincts? Elaborately dressed in frock-coats or superb uniforms—you can generally tell a Haitian nigger in Kingston by his silk-hat—might they not have a tendency to dance round fires in the moonlit clearings of forests and perform those rites necessary to placate the monsters of their imagination? Well, there is no chance of their being left alone so we need hardly worry about the possible result. Meanwhile let us take them as they are, this volatile, prolific race, this race of children, and let us share with them the sunshine and the warmth.

Few things were more delightful in those days than the night garden-parties at Government House. The band of the West India Regiment played in the grounds and Chinese lanterns swung from the lower branches. White dresses and shirt fronts gleamed amidst the trees and in the chiaroscuro of the night the range of the Blue Mountains showed up like the enamelled pattern on the rim of a disc. It was good to roam with some pretty girl under the bamboo shade and to listen in the charmèd dusk to the prattle of her talk. And when, at last, midnight approached and it was time to depart there was still that walk home to Constant Springs through the banked and scented footways. A pleasant memory!

A shower of heavy rain would often fall towards morn and when I emerged the grass would be yet glistening. Drops trembled on the leaves and scattered over the forest with each breath of wind. The smells of the washed earth mounted ambrosially upon the air and, tramping uphill to the reservoir, I would inhale them as I let my eyes wander at leisure. The fertile variety of the island spread itself in distant sweeps and far beneath me the contours of the plain

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faded away before the dazzling sea. With soaking feet and heroic appetite I would re-enter the hotel in time for breakfast. These walks gave one a feeling of abnormal virtue, but, better still, they gave one a feeling of boundless health. I ate and—ate again. I used to begin with fruit, and though the fruits of the Tropics cannot compare with the fruits of Europe, yet a king-pineapple, a grape-fruit, and a mango are very luscious and have tempted me too often to repletion. They say you can only eat a mango comfortably in a bath, but why spoil the bath? My belief is that you can't eat it comfortably at all: but if you choose a "No. eleven" when it is quite ripe, and have a sponge handy, 'tis an exquisite morsel. Yet they cloy almost ere they cease pleasing, even the best, and as for other brands, I would as soon think of devouring stringy pine-cones. Hark to the words of experience!

I had made friends with a congenial pair and we decided to hire a car and go across the island to Port Antonio. It was an expensive treat but it was worth it. We climbed into the Blue Mountains and, reaching the summit, scudded headlong down steep and winding roads. Below us lay the sugar fields of the north and the wrinkled sea with surf upon its beaten edge. In the afternoon we reached the Titchfield, which guards, without, the village of Port Antonio. It is—or should I say "was," for it has been burnt and rebuilt?—an imposing structure, erected upon a point, and designed mainly for the solace of Americans. There is nothing to equal it in all the West Indies. Equal it?—there is nothing to come within a mile of it. In its cool and lavish comfort it resembles the hotels of Florida. They know how to manage that sort of thing in the States and to work miracles in the waste. It is curious how few English were to be seen at the Titchfield and how few Americans at Constant Springs: they might belong to different islands. We found ourselves in a regular atmosphere

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of American colonels and blond beauties from Kentucky. And very jolly it was. In the morning I used to row across the bight and join the bathers in the shallows. One could loiter for hours in that tepid water—but I am not sure whether I would not rather have loitered alone. Mixed bathing is a mixed blessing.

The rainfall at Port Antonio is heavier than beyond the hills. Of an afternoon the clouds would gather and the torrents would sweep over the shore. But later the setting sun would shine anew and in the freshness of the rain-cooled air one would drive out along the coast. Passing through the Main Street of Port Antonio you came presently upon sand-dunes and mangrove swamps that gave into a leafy track where the hibiscus grew and where steep islets rose desolate and verdurous along the shore. Dank was the smell of the forest mould and rank the oozy slime at the mangrove roots. My drive took me three miles down the beach to a spot in the forest where the ocean, dribbling over a ridge of pebbles, forms suddenly a deep, wide pool beneath the trees. In that semi-circle of wooded rise, beyond the fret but not the murmur of the sea, it rests for ever in an unvexed stillness. The bather, floating on the sun-warmed surface, stirs with his foot its icy, steely depths, and looking downward he descries outlandish fish hovering above its sandy bed. A scum of foam and of decaying leaves verges the pool and rubs upon the overarching twigs. As evening advances shadows creep across the water, the sheen fades, and darkness has gathered while the western sky is still red. So let us forsake it and depart.

The drive back used to wake in me an overpowering sense of contrast, as though from a London flat I had looked suddenly into the very heart of the wild. A month ago and—now! And in the eerie loneliness of the forest, in the great hush and tremor of the sea, one

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felt extraordinarily released from the ties of other days. They had fallen from one in the knowledge that one's whereabouts were unknown to all the world. (Oddly enough, I have had occasionally almost the same sensation in England when having a hot bath at two in the morning!) A whimsical delusion this, in which contrast, that asset of romance, appeared as the champion of escape, a whimsical delusion and a short-lived. For the lights of the hotel drove one back upon the sure sequence of one's life and sharpened every zest and hope. The dinners were excellent and American, and after dinner the guests danced upon the parquet floors as we ourselves used to dance in the humbler atmosphere of Constant Springs. Behind them the lights of the fruit-steamers undulated in the bay below and, going out upon the balcony, one faced the immense and starry waters of the blurred Atlantic. Who was it said that idleness hangs heavy upon the hands? It seemed to me to hang uncommonly light. If only one got more chances of testing the theory!

We remained several days at Port Antonio and then trained back to Kingston. I have always had a strong wish to travel right across Jamaica, from east to west, from Kingston to Montego Bay, through the country of the savannahs and the cock-pits, but I have never done it. It is one of my idiosyncrasies (or failings) that though I can summon up energy to go thousands of miles to a place, yet, once I have arrived, I am apt to remain all the time in some particular garden or house. The impossibility of really knowing a country appals me and the size of even small islands fills me with despair. Moreover, I am too easy a victim of the sun not to rest when the day is at its full, though, indeed, the heat of the Tropics affects me less than the summer heat of southern Europe. I have spoken of this wish of mine because in the journey from Port Antonio to Kingston one joins the main branch at Spanish Town and runs over it for the last few miles. It is westward

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thence that the unknown begins for me. But Spanish Town, itself, I have seen more than once—a quaint, sleepy survival of those days when, as capital of Jamaica, it was the centre of trade and influence and the planters brought thither their ladies for His Excellency's receptions. It stands, this relic of bygone state, in fruitful banana-ground, and a canal runs past it and away by the vast plantations that reach almost to Kingston.

Is it better to be a dead lion or a living dog? I have seen Kingston, the present capital, before the earthquake and I have seen it shortly after, but I have not seen it since it was properly rebuilt, so it is, perhaps, wiser in me to keep quiet. These West Indian ports look bewitching in the distance, with a film of colour playing over them, but close at hand they reveal themselves in a squalid and tawdry guise. If you would visit them at their best, visit them in the dawn when they are yet unsoiled by the day and still carry upon them the mystery of silent streets. I remember going into Kingston early one morning to enquire as to a steamer and wandering out upon one of the empty quays. It was a soft morning, with a promise of heat, and the water shimmered like satin towards Port Royal. Kingston slept beside the sleeping sea. A boatload of convicts was moving across the bay and the rowers seemed to drowse upon their oars as men starting for a lazy excursion. It was as if their guards had been touched into somnolence by the peaceful equanimity of the moment. A fallacious fancy no doubt—but, all the same, I would rather be a convict here than on Dartmoor! Indeed, I would rather be several things in Jamaica than their equivalent in England. For instance—— but the list is too big. Yet in time would come the reaction, the longing for home. Eternal summer would create a nostalgia for the four seasons. The Tropics do not steal upon the white man's heart as do South Africa or New Zealand, but

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overwhelm it with a rush which, in its passage, leaves a corroding blank. This verdict (and it is universal) used to make me very indignant, but it is essentially true. There is no paradise beneath the sun.

The literature on Jamaica is enormous and historically important. The Memoirs, Descriptions, and Travels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would form a valuable library. But I do not know of any really impressive imaginative work dealing with the island—though, in another field, there is surely no more charming ornithological book than the rare supplementary volume of illustrations to Gosse's *Birds of Jamaica*. There are many novels that are mediocre, but where is the great artist? He is wanted: Jamaica calls dumbly for her interpreter. Her soil, if not so romantic as that of Cuba or the Spanish Main, is, heaven knows, romantic enough. Surely someone will arise to give her new life in the ardent rectitude of a great romance!

I have done. But it is not without a pang that I close these random notes and put away my reminiscent thoughts. And yet by continuing them I might only weaken the impression I have hoped to make. The last time I was in the West Indies I was unable to visit Jamaica. It saddened me then and, in reflection, it saddens me now. For I would wish to keep my memories of it always fresh and to recall, in person, the vanished hours upon the remembered spots. Fair island and rich, shall I see you again, or are you lost to me for ever in the dark whirligig of time?

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III

FOOTSTEPS IN SPAIN

AFTER the long run southward from Paris, when darkness has enveloped the flats and you are ready for sleep, it is tiresome to hear the frontier officials at Irun calling upon you to descend. But it is not a mere customs formality. The gauge of the two railway systems is different and if you would enter Spain there is nothing for it but to obey. Across the platform, under the scanty glare of the lamps, stands a replica of the Sud Express, brown-coloured and luxurious, but built as though for a nation of dwarfs.

The change is made with reasonable celerity and, hopelessly awake, you rétire to bed. They charge, if I remember, an exorbitant sum for the limited pleasure of a sleeping-car and, bumping about all night, I bitterly regretted my extravagance. But at dawn I roused myself and looked forth from my window and beheld, without enthusiasm, the arid plateau of northern Spain. We were ambling along at some twenty-five miles an hour through a wild and desolate upland cut by stony valleys and all heaped up with the detritus of ages. It was not the Spain of my imagination. Every instant did I think more longingly of the warm South, of oleander smells in dewy gardens, of twilight meetings upon secret balconies. Good-bye to such hopes! Madrid disillusioned me as it has disillusioned many another. One used to hear in drawing-rooms a type of ballad, now growing out of date, which beautifully recounted how "I loved you once in Old Madrid." But Madrid, unfortunately, is neither old nor romantic. It is not at all the place one would choose for love. Besides, where are the pretty

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women? *I* never could discover. I remember sitting in my hotel and gazing out upon the hurrying multitude, upon the endless tramcars of the Puerta del Sol, and feeling nothing but disgust. I am not blasé, but you might as well have searched for adventures in a back-yard. The evening would be coming on and after half an hour of this spectacle I would slowly retire and make my way to the Prado. It is a mediocre park but it has its attractions. Here Spanish Society suns itself at the fall of day, though the lines of demarcation are not, perhaps, drawn so close as in the parks of provincial cities, where the Aristocrats, the Bourgeois, and the Workmen move in three distinct streams, equally self-contained and antagonistic.

Madrid is a town of petty and precipitous streets. The Royal Palace, a building of portentous size, dominates the wretched valley of the Manzanares and serves as a kind of lodestone to every walk. But sometimes I would resolutely turn in the opposite direction and, going down the hill, spend an hour in the Gallery of the Prado, with its great treasures of Velasquez, Goya, and Titian. But no picture-gallery attracts me for long. I don't know why it is, but I prefer a railway-station. Little wonder then that I grew more and more depressed, until finally I had to shut myself in my room with a bag of unripe peaches. In the summer weather a torpidity hangs over Madrid by day. It is towards late afternoon that life stirs afresh and the streets fill up with private carriages. Your Madrileño would rather starve in a cellar than give up his carriage-and-pair—or is it now a motor? From dusk till the early hours the activity increases and at about two a.m. the cafés are in their full stride and friends greet one another as though night did not exist. In my hotel it was the favourite hour for starting a game of billiards. The methodical click of the balls gave me, in my half-sleep, a vivid foretaste of

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hell. So vivid was it, indeed, that I resolved on an immediate change, and impatiently throwing Toledo and the Escorial to the winds (how I regret it!), I took the night train to Seville.

I departed, I remember, on a hot evening in July when the sun was sinking over the stubble fields of Castille and all the level plain was aglow. Don Quixote's country, home of Sancho Panza and Maritornes! A fine subject for enthusiasm, but only so-so in the result. Madrid had blunted my appetite. Next morning I reached Seville and, after search, discovered, far from the station, a superior hotel where green palms shaded an inner court and invited the dusty traveller to rest in cool security. It was, I am afraid, somewhat of a pleasing myth. For Seville in mid-summer is a city of the damned. The dry torture of its heat radiates from the pavements and smokes from the very river itself. Only within the deep aisles of the Cathedral can you find a momentary respite. In the inner shadow of that enormous Pile there broods a perpetual twilight; figures move mysteriously to and fro, canvases of Murillo glimmer from the walls, candles flicker before the shrines. A grim melancholy reigns in it for ever and your perceptions swim in heavy incense and in a dusk that has no to-morrow. Many a devout one must have had ecstatic visions in Seville Cathedral—Nuns of the sixteenth century and fanatic Jesuits setting out for Paraguay. Unwritten history, indeed! But I do not know whether its enticement lessens as the months grow cooler. No longer then can it serve as a double refuge from the world; its divine office alone remains. . . . I should like to visit it in April.

Of all Spanish edifices Seville Cathedral and the Escorial are the most typically Spanish, more Spanish even than the Cathedrals of Leon, Toledo, or Burgos. And this is not so much in their architecture (which, in Seville, is not baroque at all) as in their sense of

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colossal effort and impossible achievement. The mind of Spain reaches out towards something immeasurably beyond the grasp of man. That, truly, is a national characteristic which has had a deadly effect upon people of real ability, who would rather do nothing than fail openly before the unobtainable. Spain is full of dreamers, men of soaring ambition, whose lives slip away in idleness and whose outward cynicism is but a bitter acknowledgment of inevitable defeat. A few peaks in exploration, in painting, in literature, and in architecture, have glorified the nation, only to freeze further effort. The Spaniard of our time—not of course the peasant, who now, as always, can barely snatch a living from the unproductive soil, but the intellectual—is the victim of history and of a hopeless ideal; for is not his country the land of "to-morrow," where anything or nothing may happen, because it is the land of "yesterday," in which the giants lived and worked.

From the Giralda, that winding, venerable Tower whose fame disappoints one in the actuality, you get a commanding view of the city. A huge bull-ring in the distance overtops the flat roofs, and the Cathedral, rising at your side, is like a massive symbol of the faith of ages. The streets, built high and narrow to avoid the glare, only show up where the eye catches them in a direct line. Seville, unlike Madrid, is old, but in its apparent uniformity one misses the quaint charm of the old towns of northern Europe. And on this side of the river it is flat, flat as a pancake. The surrounding country stretches away without an undulation. From above, the spectacle has but a topographical attraction; but below, in the drowsy atmosphere of its gardens, the Moorish personality of Seville is still awake. If only the sun would burn itself out . . .

In some unremembered way I fell in with an American who, in the midst of fading recollections,

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remains with me as a kind of legendary figure. He was one of the biggest men I have ever seen, looming like a ship, and he spoke of naught but his own country's domestic politics. He was a Democrat in the days when Democrats were not popular, and he used to hold forth with such outraged eloquence against the Republicans that I actually began to fear the upshot. Luckily we were almost the only non-Spaniards there —for I really cannot count his wife, a fragile, vague sort of woman who hovered in the background like a perturbed sparrow and would suddenly disappear as though she couldn't stand it a second longer. But the question is, Why should he have been there? I simply don't think he knew why. He certainly didn't like it—he hated it—and as certainly was under no need to stay. A theory suggests itself that he may have boarded a steamer under the impression that a political meeting was in progress. But why Seville? I give it up.

It was after dinner we used to meet. He never smiled, but taking me apart, like a corpulent conspirator, he would enlarge for hours upon the crimes of a corrupt Government. Once, I remember, we drove together along the lamp-lit shore of the Guadalquivir. Towering above me as though I were five feet instead of six feet three in my boots, with glazed eyes and head sunk on his chest, he looked the very picture of a slumbrous idol. I waited for him to begin, as it was always unwise to offer suggestions. And presently, the calm night having stimulated his powers, he shook himself, as it were, and launched out upon the denunciation of another intolerable scandal. I did not listen attentively, partly because I never knew who was who in his stories and partly because I was regarding the river, but his voice, grating and furious, sounded in my ear like a tireless bumble-bee. It was not altogether unpleasant; but in future I drove alone. And with this I will bid him farewell. We

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parted excellent friends and I never saw him again. But if verbal capacity has its just rewards he will go far. Perhaps he has gone far already. I trust so. He deserves much.

Day by day the heat seemed to intensify. I was reduced to lying all afternoon on my bed, panting. It was not an experience I relished and I speedily took myself off to the coast. I went south to the Mediterranean. Going south in Spain implies, I fear, an almost inevitable convergence upon a junction called Bobadilla, which is a place with a nasty smell and no amenities, where you have to wait interminably for unpunctual trains. The only break in the monotony was when a fat dog was cut clean in two by a carriage moving out of the station at one mile an hour. It was a shocking event, but as no one expressed any surprise, least of all the other dogs basking on the line, I suppose it must be a daily occurrence. I should think that anyone living in Bobadilla, dog or man, would find his way sooner or later to the railway. . . . At length, after a purgatory of discomfort, the Malaga train steamed in.

From Bobadilla to Malaga one passes through the grandest of mountain scenery. By precipices and beetling rocks, hanging upon the sides of fearful world-convulsions and plunging through the very fastnesses of the hills, you wind slowly downwards. A gloom as of eternal night rises chill out of the abyss. But the splendour soon recedes and the skying crags end tamely on the flat. The last stage of the journey is drawn-out and uninviting.

Malaga is as unattractive as Madrid, but, though I dwelt there for a period, yet I saw little of it as I lived in the suburb of Caleta and spent most of my time in a garden fronting the Mediterranean and only divided from it by a narrow shingle beach. I stayed in a boarding-house which turned out to be quite a menagerie of rare specimens. What a set! Two

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Russians, rather mysterious, like heroines out of Turgenev, I liked; but they soon left. There was a Swedish lady, too, vitriolic and talkative, a Dane with a fair, turned-up moustache and a habit of guffawing suddenly at nothing, a Swiss who was betrothed to the landlady's niece and spent all his time holding her hand (a most improper proceeding in Spain), and various other individuals that I can't be bothered to recall. Then the Spaniards themselves: three daughters of the house, swarthy, amiable, and developing rapidly towards obesity, the widowed mother, whose development was complete, and the only son, who had spent several years in America and was said to speak English with touching fluency. I fancy, however, that there must have been a doubt as to his skill, because one day I was particularly asked to examine him before the whole family. It was not a success: he only knew four short words, which he kept interjecting on some entirely irrelevant system and which he eked out with flowing gestures and an inane grin. But at the severe glances of his mother and sisters he assumed, all at once, a truculent air and marched off in a huff. I noticed that when, a few days later, I had a lady to dinner and ordered a bottle of champagne—we were dining that evening on little scattered tables spread about the garden—he graphically ordered one for himself, just to prove, I take it, that he was as good a man as I. It was his own champagne, but I daresay it gave him great satisfaction.

I used to go for a daily swim. Two hundred yards from shore I would roll over on my back and float like a tepid cork, the salt drying on my forehead, the play of light dazzling the wavelets around. Then, making for the beach, I would dress myself and sit in that sub-tropical garden and bask. The sun, dancing upon the blue waters, gave everything an air of joy and freedom, and in that tideless sea the wash upon the pebbles came to me no louder than a murmur. It was

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delightful, but it was short-lived. Before twelve I had to escape under a roof, limp as a damp rag. What evil genius made me choose such a month! At lunch-time we assembled in the dining-room, which act constituted the formal beginning of the day; though my day had already passed. I will not describe the meal—I would not willingly describe any meal I had in Spain. Their idea of pleasing a stranger is to offer him a bad imitation of French cookery, whereas he probably longs to sample ollas, guisados, and gazpachos. You must visit private houses or native inns to taste the real food of the country.

On my way upstairs for the afternoon siesta I would pause for an instant to stare heedlessly out. On these occasions I frequently descried a disreputable fellow at work amongst the sunken flower-pots. He was a man who had met me when I got out at Malaga—a man overbearing and voluble, very ragged, and only to be distinguished from a tramp by having a brass name-plate on his cap. It appears that he did all the odd jobs of the house, although, officially, he did not exist. He was one of those people who attach themselves to establishments, cannot be got rid of, and are finally winked at until they do something really too outrageous. This scamp was constantly trying to waylay me and impress upon me, in so many words, that he was a member of the staff (what did I care whether he was or was not?), while, on the other hand, the landlady was for ever assuring me that he had nothing to do with her at all. She detested him, he was a loathsome fungus that had fastened upon her from nowhere! "Meanwhile, Señor, he uses my garden-shed as a bedroom." A situation like this could only be presented effectively in Opéra Bouffe. It was very harrowing, but the affair was finally brought to a head during my visit by this enlightened man—for I bear witness that he frequently observed that he knew all about London and hated bull-fights—running

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amok with a knife. The police being sent for, he incontinently disappeared.

His advanced opinions are not shared by the rest of Malaga, which possesses a fine bull-ring and has the rules of the game at its finger-tips. (I believe they fill several volumes.) Together with the Swiss, whose enthusiasm had temporarily outweighed his love, I went on a gala afternoon to witness one of these fights. But I did not enjoy it. When I saw a thick red curtain of blood pouring down either flank of a bull and a horse trembling in a corner with its bowels dragging on the sand, I felt nauseated and went out. It was only the beginning, as six more bulls and another twenty horses had soon been hauled, matted corpses, from the arena, but it was sufficient for me. I heard the shouts, but all my excitement had gone and I walked only the quicker towards my garden. I am not a moralist—though I hate the expression, "Art for Art's sake"—but I have never quite been able to forgive the remark an intelligent Spaniard once made to me apropos of bull-fighting. "Why," said he, "if you didn't kill the bull it would kill you." What a doctrine of mean deception!

I had brought with me to Malaga a book of the most inordinate length and this enabled me to while away many a cheerless hour. There is (forgive so obvious an axiom) no solitude like that of uncongenial society. Moreover, there are places, and Malaga is one of them, that fatigue the imagination by something acrid and unpromising in their very vitals. It's difficult to explain precisely what I mean, but I fancy that it is a commonly-felt emotion. Great expectations collapse too often in ignoble boredom. And here, at Malaga, my reaction was the result of hope—of hope delayed yet still surviving.

Was it this weariness, I ask myself, that gave to the episode of one night, in its very contrast, so haunting a recollection? I had gone to bed and had

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fallen asleep when suddenly I heard, in one of those rare waking moments when we hover between two worlds, the solemn notes of a chime striking the hour of twelve. Then all over distant Malaga other chimes began to strike, deep and soft, taking up each other, pausing, dying away, like some majestic harmony of the night. I listened to it as to the music of the spheres. It was thrilling as first love and, like first love, it will return no more. Something sweet and fresh irradiated my heart and I could have wept with joy. I listened and, listening, I was neither asleep nor awake; only upon my soul the droughts were melting and the springs were again unloosed. Memories of 1906!

I stayed on week after week in Caleta, although its charms came to be but ashes in my mouth. As night fell I and the daughters of the house would start forth upon a dignified promenade along the beach. Across the bay the lights of Malaga began to shine and in the luminous air the stars appeared one by one over the Mediterranean. With the second of the three girls I lingered behind. She was handsome, with sparkling eyes, and dark as Erebus. But our talk, carried on in halting French, would languish and die out. The tenderness of the hour should have favoured youthful confidences, but the self-possession of the señorita was inexorable. Her clear laugh floated over the water, and her eyes, turned upon me in the dusk, seemed to mock my attempts at gallantry.

The truth is, we are all, in England, utterly mistaken about Spanish women. It is they who are the true rulers of their country, and their rule is practical, organized, and censorious. Our idea of a romantic Spain, where women are the slaves of passion, is a delectable figment. They are the slaves of nothing but common sense. Their love-making may appear flowery—yet what do they do but sit on a balcony with a fan?—but, like our boxing, it is merely

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a national custom sanctified by tradition. Long ago Spain produced men, now she produces women. The Conquistadores flung wide upon the New World the restless vigour of a masculine kingdom, the Señoras of to-day concentrate their energies on that subterranean power which is the feminine equivalent of dominion. The sun has set and the moon has risen. A pale substitute, no doubt, but one which pervades all the land with the glow-worm reflection of a vanished world. "If," said a Basque to me once, "the women of my country only had a civic conscience the ill-government of Spain would be over in a week." But that is precisely what they have not. Despising men, they despise their addiction to politics, love, and cafés. Even Catholicism, which is supposed to mould their lives, serves largely as a rallying-ground of the Order. Women meet in churches as men in restaurants—and to better purpose. Instead of talking about illicit amours they are more likely to discuss whether the local bank manager is spending too much. There is no such thing as an unprofessionally loose class of women in Spain. Let the men be immoral if they choose (and they do choose), only let them realize that no ordinary woman is going to risk the social annihilation that will certainly follow the breaking of any one of the laws upon which, unitedly, they have founded their omnipotence.

The difficulty of understanding Spaniards may, I think, lead to a difficulty in appreciating Spain. I am conscious that my disparagement may be a form of stupidity from which I will awaken one of these days. The entertaining Ford of the *Gatherings* and the epicurean Gautier of the *Voyage en Espagne* would doubtless say so. But the preconceived idea is hard to overcome. I don't like to confess—especially with a knowledge of the just and unexaggerating realism of Cervantes—that drawing-room ballads have vitiated my judgment; but it may be the truth. Moreover, the summer heat of Spain is blinding to the senses. A

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land such as this, with its golden past, its sonorous language (how superior to the Italian!), its names eloquent upon the tongue, and the dignity of its relics, must have something in it far beyond the paltry effects of sensuous delight. I begin to suspect that I missed unwittingly just that which I desired to find.

But, in return, I found one thing which I desired to miss—that is to say, garlic. It is not the taste that is nasty; the taste is nice. I don't mean that I hadn't found garlic before—one can't travel in southern Europe without making its acquaintance—but never in so virulent a form. It is impossible to speak calmly about it. A mere outrage! And in Spain the air of cities festers under this monstrous contagion. (No, that's picturesque but too strong.) I have had to talk to people who appeared to have swallowed the whole local crop. (That is *not* too strong.) The porter in the hotel, the gentleman in the wagon-lit, may each in his affable desire for conversation, reveal the hideous secret. Abomination of abominations! Abhorred weed! . . .

At last, after many days, I summoned up my energy and went to Granada. The approach is through valleys of cornfields and olive-groves which lead into a plain backed by the cordillera of the Sierra Nevada. Below these mountains, at the very gate of the city, there towers a wooded rock, in formation not unlike to that of an Edinburgh much enlarged. It is on this rock, overlooking the plain, the brown-white city, and the cave-dwellings of the gypsies—which, unfired by any George Borrow, I foolishly omitted to visit—that the ruins of the Alhambra spread in their lichen-like beauty. Here, too, is the unfinished Palace a vandal King would have built from their stones and here the hotels made ready against the pilgrims to the Shrine. It was dark when I drove up on to the hill and strange it was to hear the water trickling amongst the roots of the trees. For Granada, itself, is dry and thirsty as any city of Spain. It was Wellington who

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planted these beeches and made this wilderness to blossom as the rose. But, all around, the parched expanse is fit only for the cactus, that desert-thorn.

Of the Alhambra there is little that I can say. In its aged, silent courts a feeling steals upon one too elusive, too fragrant to be trapped in any snare of words. I will not speak of the grace, the infinite detail, the elaboration of Moorish art, of ornate ceilings or of slender columns, but I will ask you to think, rather, of dwindling vistas of court within court, of plashing fountains, and of sunken gardens lying beneath you in the hollows of the cliff. In the long summer afternoons I have sat there until the sky flushed over Granada, I have paced alone the garden of a Queen. But how can I convey the magic of atmosphere or the pregnant stillness of ruins? Guidebooks give every detail and leave one unmoved, poetic descriptions fill one with shame. It is wisest to say nothing, to put Irving away, to hold one's memories within one's heart.

On the whole, I enjoyed these days more than any others that I passed in Spain. It was an inactive life, but the Alhambra beckons one towards inactivity and contemplation. There, beneath me, lay the city unexplored. But I was not envious. I had no intention of diving off my hill into the unknown. At night we dined out of doors upon a green lawn. One long table accommodated the few guests and a feeling of polite camaraderie gave a pleasant, family-party touch to the meal. And after dinner, when I had drunk my coffee, I used to stroll through the plantations and hear the water gushing in its rills. I loved that sound as though I had spent my life in the Sahara. . . . So sped the days and nights.

There came a moment when I realized that time was running out and that I must go to Paris forthwith. It meant travelling without a rest and, though I accomplished the task, I hope never to undertake such another. It was a nightmare of heat, dozing,

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banging, getting tickets punched, changing, and thirst —thirst above all. The sagacious Spaniard travels with a porous water-bottle (but that was before the era of the thermos flask), which, by outward evaporation, keeps cool the precious liquid. He also carries food, such as tortillas and a cold chicken. When he begins his own meal the custom of the country induces him to offer refreshment to any other occupant of the carriage. It means little more than the "All that I have is thine" of the Oriental and should be declined as courteously as it is tendered. But I must frankly admit that when someone offered me water I most earnestly accepted and nearly finished the bottle. Ah, that journey! Seventy hours, no proper halts, and seven changes! The day sank into night and the night, starry over the waste, paled into a nerveless dawn. And dry-eyed, covered with bituminous coal-dust, alert and weary, I counted the minutes. Well, it is over and done with these many years. Let it pass into oblivion. Yes, let it pass. I will not make the slightest effort to describe the zig-zag, cross-country jolt to Valencia. Its slow anguish stirs in my immediate consciousness few images beyond that of the choice orange-plain, irrigated and earthy, which slants into the town, and of the bull-fighters, with their mutilated faces, pigtails, and diamond rings, who, for some woeful hours, filled my compartment.

From Valencia to Barcelona is a night's run, and at Barcelona there awaited me a real corridor-train, pointing northwards to Hendaye and the eastern frontier. I retired to the lavatory, looked at myself in the glass, and saw—a criminal. I had not washed for forty-eight hours; I was filthy beyond words, haggard, and unshaved. I'm surprised they let me enter that aristocratic car. But presently a new man emerged, smiling graciously upon the conductor and carrying a small bag. The tiny germ of hope that had supported me for two such days and nights had blossomed at last.

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IV

THROUGH CAPE TOWN AND THE PENINSULA

WHEN the south-easter blows a fleecy cloud often clings about the top of the hill and Table Mountain is said to be covered with its cloth. When the south-easter blows? But the question in these summer months is, When does the south-easter not blow? The inhabitants turn their eyes to the Mountain as they awake and, seeing that ominous blanket, they know that the morning calm is deceptive and that presently the wind will rise and columns of dust sweep along the streets. It is no joke. In the great heat, with that one puff of white staining the sky, the roar of it passes over you like a fiery blast. A drastic and disagreeable wind, a wind spoiling the sea-beauty of the Cape Town summer. For what a place this would be without it, and how delightful it is on the rare still evenings to sit on the front and gaze across the water to the sands of Milnerton and on the curving bay that opens to the Cape Flats and the distant mountains beyond Stellenbosch. At your back the city slopes upward upon Table Mountain, whose wall of rock towers square and dark as the sun sinks down behind the Lion's Head. Peace is in the air, the peace of the tired day, and the whole landscape takes on a tinge of immemorial repose. Beyond the pier, on which the electric points will soon be aglitter, the masts and funnels of the shipping stand boldly against the dusk, and on the quiet of the water a few boats lie spell-bound, a few gulls and divers float as on a sea of glass. The mountains of the Drakenstein are outlined in fading mauve and round the girdle of the bay lights are twinkling already. The stale

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breath of the city, the breath of its exhaustion, does not penetrate here, where the ozone of the sea comes up from the lapping tide. Ah, if there were but more nights like this and if the trade-wind would but start in the far ocean!

As a city, Cape Town, with its 180,000 inhabitants, can never be surveyed at a single glance. Its two arms are flung wide apart, one following the base of the mountain across the Peninsula, the other, the line of the bay past the docks, along the withered common to Sea Point. But if you will take the car over the hill and alight at the Kloof Neck, some seven hundred feet up, you will see the whole central portion of the city spreading and sinking away beneath you from the pine woods to the marge of Table Bay. A lovely prospect, glowing by noon, tremulous by night, and, as it were, all too full for words. From this Neck, a road, at right angles to the tram-line, will carry you across the face of the Mountain and round its further edge to where the wooded suburbs lie sleeping in eternal shade. Over the summit of the hill the pine woods have disappeared and the arid slopes of the Twelve Apostles frown above the wind-swept sea. As the car slips downward, writhing between heathy banks, all the details of the shore, the white froth and drenched rocks, detach themselves from the vast expanse of the wide ocean. But Camp's Bay, itself, is depressing and it is best to go straight on to Cape Town along the coast. The circular run occupies about an hour and a half, and whence you started in Adderley Street there will you alight when your drive is over.

Adderley Street—the chief street, the *only* street of Cape Town, the universal meeting-place! From the Mount Nelson Hotel, down through the Avenue, past the Gardens, the Library, Government House, and the Parliament Buildings, past the big stores, the Post Office, and the Railway Station, a

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straight road runs to meet the pier, with the statue of Van Riebeek alert and welcoming in the foreground. An imposing sight! Adderley Street and Cape Town are synonymous words in the minds of a good many people. On a Saturday morning you might almost imagine yourself in a fourth-rate Regent Street. Not that that is any merit in my eyes—in fact, it is just what damns it for me. Were it not for its kerbstone flower-market, where are gathered all the gorgeous blooms of the veld, I should put it from my mind with complete indifference. Who cares for these Main Streets where personality is of no account and where nothing flourishes but the foolish bustle, inquisitiveness, and vanity of mankind? No, the real Cape Town emerges more and more as you move away from its centre. In the wastes of District Six or of Salt River (the homes of the coloured people and of the railwaymen), in the wooded isolation of the Gardens, in the bare slopes of the Malay quarter, in mean streets full of Greek fruit-shops and second-hand furniture dealers, in all the mixed and hidden conglomeration of a great city, breathes its living individuality. An English city truly—the African strongholds of the Dutch lie inland—but one streaked with the elements of a foreign port and of the gateway to an immense continent. Did I say an English city? Perhaps a Colonial city of English stock would be more accurate. For upon this English world has been grafted something new, the budding germ of a race, the subtle and unconscious development of a nation. You can tell the native-born, not alone by the clipping inflection of his voice but by a temperamental attitude which it would be hard to define. Certainly I met some sterling people in Cape Town—there were also others. But in mass, at any rate, mankind is true to type. In this parent city of South Africa, whose age has seen the domination of several races and is beholding now the growth of another, life has little new

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to offer the observer. From the ramparts of the seventeenth-century Dutch Castle, which still bravely fronts the sea, men saw the conquest of the wilderness and the backward flow of the dark races. Civilization has put her hand upon the Peninsula and the surrounding country once and for all. What would old Barrow or old Burchell (who are, after all, not old compared to the first Dutchmen) think of the present changes, let alone Semple, author of the genial *Walks and Sketches*, or Van Pallandt, whose curious and rather caustic pamphlet, *General Remarks on the Cape of Good Hope*, has recently been translated from the unique copy of 1803 ?

The life of the city ticks on with the diligent regularity of a watch. Ships arrive, trains start for the interior, everyone goes about his business till the evening. And yet upon this universal stir there weighs an air of sleepiness and lassitude. The activities are, so to speak, the activities of a half-way house, of a prosperous middleman ; in Cape Town, itself, there is small original vitality. It is a kind of parasite hanging on to the very tip of South Africa's tail. To the suburbs retire the honourably worn-out and superannuated as to a Cheltenham of the south. The Peninsula is famed for its climate and in the season is invaded by rich Jews from Johannesburg, who make of Muizenberg a second Doornfontein and swarm like rabbits upon the sand. In this glaring sea-village, situated fifteen miles from Cape Town across the slender width of the Peninsula, where not a tree shelters you from the sun and where the surge combs green and white off the Indian Ocean, thousands of fat women and well-lined men dip and wallow in the spray. It is an amusing sight but rather monotonous. Personally, I preferred to bathe at the end of the Cape Town pier, where the water, cooled by the Antarctic currents, is more refreshing and more forsaken. On many a seething day I have dived into its chill depths and,

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scrambling out, have smoked a cigarette upon the benches above. The heat casts a sort of dimness over the Mountain, and beneath the cloud, if cloud there be, a grey or golden mist has drawn in the late afternoon. There is a feeling of rest here unknown to the more gaudy atmosphere of Muizenberg, whose rollers break upon a shore which should never have been reclaimed and the mountain-horns of whose broad bay, the Capes of Hangklip and Good Hope, lie inaccessibly far apart. Desolation is grand, but there is nothing grand about a pavilion, a row of bathing-machines, and a hundred hotels and boarding-houses.

No, I detest Muizenberg and all the string of villages leading thence to the Imperial Naval Station at Simon's Town. An ineradicable vulgarity has fallen upon those shores and the only solace they yield is the fishing for mackerel and mossbonker off Kalk Bay pier. But even that has been spoilt for me by the obliging greediness of the fish, which gives you no time to contemplate the water in the esteemed fashion. You merely throw in your line and haul it out again. I never thought the lust of capture would bore me so soon—it must be like shooting a thousand pheasants in one day. Heaps upon heaps of mackerel with glassy eyes, with the nasty stickiness of dead fish, litter the stonework of the pier, and the row of earnest men is still dragging them out as the darkness gathers. But I must be off! I don't relish this smell of a fish-shambles and somehow I begin to feel a distaste for the whole affair—it's too much like the Slaughter of the Innocents.

But, though I hate Muizenberg and all that it stands for, I used to find a perennial pleasure in looking out of the window as I journeyed thither through the outer suburbs. Those vistas of leafy avenues and roads twisting away into bosky depths, those squares of gardens, of houses lying back behind their wooded lawns, that whole atmosphere of sequestered and

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happy summer, filled me with joy. Perhaps it all reminded me of something I love in England and which is foreign to the spirit of South Africa, that something which is the mysterious hint of abundant and teeming life. I don't know: I only know that Claremont and Kenilworth and Wynberg are more to me than all the breezes of False Bay. And always there was the Mountain rising at your side with its forests and park-like open spaces. What solitary walks I have had through the woods of Newlands, through those squirrel-haunted woods, where the sunlight filters grey-green as in a Corot and the shadows of the trunks strike obliquely across the tangled skein of other shadows on the ground. In winter they are dreary enough and the drip of the showers on the bare branches has a cheerless ring, but in mid-summer there is no feeling of loneliness in their shade. Unostentatiously man has made them his own. His roads wind about them, the advance-guard of his houses is pushed up from the streets, and on the borders of the city another life reveals itself. And yet, simply because it is a natural penetration, because there has been no artistic tampering with the scene, these evidences of mankind serve only to heighten the illusion. You hear, at once, the double whisper of romance. Oh, these fringes of cities, these strange, fantastic places, unsung by poets and inhabited by stockbrokers, how they call to me from the desert and the town! I think that I could dwell very happily in the Cape Town suburbs beneath the hill, provided I could forget all about Cape Town. And when I grew weary of the trees I would cut across the line and wander through the Flats, where Germans and coloured people live in tin huts and raise vegetables for the early market. A grotesque sort of place, not much explored, but with an odd attraction of its own. Indeed, there is fascination on either side the railway. I remember one morning getting out at Rosebank with a friend and

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walking up through the woods to the Rhodes Memorial. A glorious walk and a most glorious view when, at last, we emerged before the site. Thence did we look downward across the Flats, with the neck of the Peninsula lying in our lap from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and swelling away to where the violet hills met the violet sky. Well chosen was this spot above Groote Schuur for the last token of a dreamer. The Memorial is plain and massive, with lions crouching on the steps and the figure of Physical Energy on his bronze horse shading his eyes northward where lay the land of heart's desire. A lofty idea and impressive in the absorbed dignity of that eternal watch. The sombre woods around us and above threw back the stillness of the forest upon the pastoral quiet of the plain. My friend and I sat on the coping at the foot of the Memorial and held long converse upon dead men and forgotten strife. In that hush as of unbroken calm the clamour and the discord had ceased and the spirit of a solitary dreamer pondered enigmatically over the scene. Slowly we took our way homewards through the upland fields, in which roam the animals of the zoo, and so to the cages of the lions and down again into the street, where we lunched frugally in the back-room of a grocer's shop. A fine excursion!

We made several such together, and I recall some afternoons on which we drove out to the Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch and wandered over the lawns. They lie, these Gardens, in a dell-like slope of the mountain on the further boundary of the Rhodes estate, hidden deep from idle curiosity in the bendings of wooded lanes and edged about by the grandeur of the wild. Though years must pass before they attain maturity it is, perhaps, now, as they step gradually from the surrounding waste, that they appear most attractive. Let the wind blow as it will, here it is always calm. The unrest of the elements has gained

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no footing in this tender Arcady. So it seemed to us, at least, as we sat quaffing fresh milk under the shelter of the trees. In the shrinking light the red-roofed cottage at the gate would tone with the vivid green of the lawns as in a Kentish landscape and, to the great silence of nature, the peace of evening would descend with its pensive happiness.

Expeditions like that were sometimes made by motor. If you want to see the Peninsula and are, as I was then, more or less of an invalid and, indeed, often oppressed by an internal malady, it is the only satisfactory way. It is a pity, of course, but as it had to be I mention it here with a certain coldness. Fortunately, much of the ground can be covered in public vehicles, but if reparation be called for, let me make it by describing my first drive round Table Mountain. It had been a stifling day, one of those infrequent December days without wind, enervating, heavy with the moisture of the sea. Even as I write I feel again the warning quiet of its close. Night came at last, the prayed-for night, and at nine o'clock we were speeding out of Cape Town along the lower hill-side road past Sea Point. The houses vanished, the lights receded, the Twelve Apostles rose dimly against the stars, and in the distance Camp's Bay glittered like another firmament below the heavens. Beneath us the sea lay shrouded and inert, with grey folds in the starlight, and its breaking waves gleamed suddenly with phosphorescent fire. The ocean-wind fanned our cheeks as we flew onward towards the black promontory ahead and down into the valley where the lamps of Hout Bay shone at our feet. There we rested for awhile and thence, passing inland, made for the rise and dipped over into rich Constantia with its vineyards around its old Dutch houses. And so back into Cape Town through the woods, the day-weariness lost in the sweet weariness of the night and our gloomy thoughts all blown from us in the wind of the open road.

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Since that occasion, I made this drive so often that I began to know every tiniest landmark and to discover upon the scarred summits of the rocks a whole series of faces, the faces, mostly, of gigantic and stern old men, staring upwards at the sky. A better game this than finding faces in the fire! Yes, I came to know that road intimately, but I never tired of it. One does not tire of such things. Sometimes I would turn off at Constantia and glide away through the very heart of the Peninsula, through fair Tokai, beloved of the sun and basking in its summer trance. The crimson blossoms of the gum trees bordered the fields where the vines and pumpkins were ripening and the mealies flourished their bearded heads. I could actually find it in me to envy the convicts whose prison lies in that earthly paradise. (The callousness of comfort is amazing.) Invariably I warned the driver to go slowly so that I might breathe in at leisure the glories of the vale, yet travel slowly as one would, rest even in the shade for a time, you were bound to come at last upon the Muizenberg road with its dust and its crowds. Surrender, as gracefully as possible, all rural thoughts for that afternoon!

These outings were good, but the worst of it was that the return to Cape Town too often broke the charm. Fresh from the country, the atmosphere of the city bore drearily upon you and the fumes of the bubbling tar were heavy on your lungs. I remember running in by train from Paarl one morning of late September when the mimosa was in bloom, shining in great yellow clusters between the white hillocks of the sand-dunes and scattering its pungent scent upon the air. In the buoyancy of that spring morn the blood leapt in my veins with all the hope and gaiety of youth. A hymn to colour sang in me as years ago it sang in our English poet. And yet I had no sooner set foot in the streets than I felt mundane and cold and the poetry of youth had died within me. That is

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Cape Town, that is Adderley Street! Can you wonder that I soon had enough of it?

Can you wonder, I ask? If my life were to be spent in Cape Town I would rather it were spent in the waste outskirts of Woodstock or Salt River, where ragged children play by the brackish pools and sidings tail off on to the foreshore, than in the fashionable haunts of the city. Indeed, I would. But why should I bother myself about Cape Town at all when the whole Peninsula is calling to me? This thought occurs to me as I sit here, and it occurred to me so forcibly at the time that I resolved upon new head-quarters, in which, go where you would, one country scene could only give place to another and the voices of birds would not be drowned by the clatter of the morning cars. I retired, therefore, to Hout Bay, which is distant sixteen miles. Perhaps I should not use so final a word, as my retirement lasted only a fortnight, but that fortnight was precious, in its degree. Hout Bay, itself, is the meagrest of villages, straggling down to the sea between the hills and fostered by a strip of cultivated land that trails upon the mountain-side. Large oak trees thrust up through the boarding of the stoep and in the middle of the night I would hear, above the soughing of the wind, the acorns drop resoundingly upon the tin roof. If a south-easter rises anywhere in the Peninsula Hout Bay receives it with open arms. As one sat beneath the oaks the spray of the fountain would blow into one's face and the white sand upon the hills would swirl afar like mist. But the air was as crystal. It filled one with a Dionysian happiness, a happiness much more drunken than any to be derived from the thin sparkling wines of the Cape! At night I walked by the waters. The head-lands of the bay stood dramatically against the sky and the sea shimmered and dripped upon the level beach. These, verily, were hours snatched from oblivion and from the petty harassments of that time.

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In truth, I was not in the least anxious to return to Cape Town, but I did. I am a gregarious person; I hate crowds but I like company. And being lonely in a crowd is, perhaps, the worst state of all. Often have I sat in my window at the sea-end of Adderley Street and watched the Sunday throng ebb listlessly towards the pier. There they go, the victims of a habit, the eternal crowd, inept and formidable, ready for nothing or anything. I never feel at my ease in a crowd but always as if someone were just about to utter something preposterous or cruel into my yielding ear. . . . How dull I am! Beneath my window a party of Salvationists have taken up their stand and the sudden music of their hymn causes me to lean out. There is a kind of guileless fascination in listening to these people. Fancy, if life had really nothing more in it than the complex simplicity of a long cinema drama! Come and be saved—how facile, how tantalizing! No wonder they draw to them the weary and the heavy-laden. But presently they will depart—I know they are going when I see their red collecting-cloth on the ground—and I shall be left alone with my despondency. A wanderer, a bird of passage, I must make the best of it, I suppose. Before me the water ripples upon the deserted mud of the fishermen's beach. A few men are lounging moodily by the palings, a few boys are riding their horses in the sea. I am not the first to remark that the world takes its pleasures sadly. On week-days this spot is alive with barter and excited noise; the boats are coming in with their catch and a swarm of Malays and coloured people are squabbling over the fish. But now, now there is only stagnation. The Sabbath calm of cities is like the slumber of a sick man and the Day of Rest is a mockery of slow torture. Such is my experience.

It was, I own, my generally successful endeavour to avoid those hours of boredom. Often of a Sunday morning, after breakfasting on toast at an insignificant

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café, I would walk out along the base of Signal Hill to the house of some acquaintances perched above Three Anchor Bay, where, in the retirement of their little uncared-for garden, I could forget the town. Sitting under the shade of the pepper tree one looked over the roofs and branches beneath on to the broad water, with Robben Island, that abode of lepers and lunatics, lying in the middle distance like the back of a huge whale. The scent of lavender filled the air. Sometimes an outward-bound steamer would pass before our eyes and, at the waking of the south-easter, the foam could be seen battering upon the ledges of the low island. Such peaceful employment destroys time, that treacherous servant of the lazy, and evening would find us still taking our ease or drowsing on the stoep. Well, they are gone for ever, those days, and I am not sorry.

I observe that I have an unfortunate habit of returning to Cape Town at every second sentence, to the lovely but detested city, while I would rather be wandering with you in the trackless depths of the Peninsula; but possibly it is a form of poetic justice. Nearly all my time here was passed in the town and it is having its revenge on me. So be it. But if I must speak about it let me think of something to enhance its reputation in the eyes of a reader. For instance, it has in its Michaelis Gallery by far the most representative collection of old Dutch Masters south of the equator, in its Municipal Orchestra a body of performers who fitly interpret the genius of European music along these alien shores, and in its fish, kingklip, Cape salmon, seventy-four, kabeljauw, silverfish, a form of diet worthy of the widest recognition. . . . And, talking of food, I might add to my list of good things the hanepoot, muscadel, and crystal grapes at twopence a pound and, in the month of March, that quaintest of all delicacies, penguins' eggs. It is not everyone who likes penguins' eggs, though I do, but

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fortunately for us, each one to his own taste. I had an amusing instance of this, in a different form, in a Cape Town shop. I had gone into a tailor's to order a suit and whilst the cutter was being fetched the proprietor and I engaged in affable talk:

"Did you ever happen to hear," said I, "that the father of the novelist George Meredith once practised as a tailor in Cape Town?"

"Was he a master tailor?" came the anxious retort.

Thus was his taste in human beings revealed, to the exclusion of (to me) more attractive matter.

The city is, indeed, interested in the Arts, but not passionately so—which is all to the good. Music and painting are in the vogue, but I shouldn't call the inhabitants immoderate readers. There appears to be only one second-hand bookshop, and if you are on the look-out for bargains you had better go to the Parade on a Wednesday or Saturday morning, where, amidst the seduction of cheap auctions and drapery stalls, you can always hunt over three or four trestles of literature. I have picked up many a bargain there at about sixpence, rather battered bargains, I admit, but admirable at the price. Indeed, for a period I seldom missed these gatherings, and I must say that I have very seldom seen more novel types than some of the auctioneers. Sound psychologists, too, in their way. Scorn and pathos and disheartened incredulity flow from their lips upon the crowd as they hold up a watch with a ten-year guarantee and ask whether it be really possible ("No, gentlemen, it is your little joke") that they have only been offered three shillings-and-sixpence for it. How cunningly they eye you! I wonder if they live amusing private lives? . . . The Parade never palled on me. I would go to my trestles and then I would stray from one auction to another, to the corner where they were selling cheeses "straight from the wreck," or mules,

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or old cameras, or weevily mealies, or soiled clothes. An entertaining spot and as much one of the genuine sights of Cape Town as is Plein Street on a Saturday evening. But the auction acts, altogether, a big part in this community. It seems to be the most usual of things for a man to "put up" the whole contents of his house. At any rate, the papers are full of such advertisements.

As I say, this is not a reading public (though "Africana" is much collected), and yet I met here a man, a Dutchman, whose deep-seated and self-evolved love of French literature was anything but a pose. He was not the sort of critic one could take very seriously, but nevertheless it was curious to hear this cynical and dogmatic anti-European talking with rapt admiration of the great names. I was glad to meet him and could only wish that his enthusiasm were infectious. A Hollander that I got to know was a man of a very different type, an artist of rare distinction, of complete modesty, and full of generous enthusiasms. And yet beneath the crust of reasonableness of this singular genius there lurked a fanatic who longed to have done with civilization and to fade away into the East, one of those quiet fanatics whose mind, apparently pliable, was in reality as fixed as a bar of steel. A striking man.

It is time I were drawing to an end, and if it must be of Cape Town that I write my final words let it be of a Cape Town hidden from sight in the depths of a garden. I say a garden, but I mean the Public Gardens, which, placed though they be in the heart of the town, are yet, in their sanctity, removed from the turmoil and the stress of cities. To-night the wind has dropped and the day is cooling off in a flawless eve. I emerge from the Avenue and take one of the winding paths and presently I find myself in a stillness of bright verdure and leafy trees. A few old men are reading the evening paper on the benches, a few clerks are

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hurrying homewards from work, but otherwise the place is deserted save for the gardeners who are yet pottering about the beds or dragging a hose over a patch of lawn. In this hot February the flowers are gay and the great Mountain looms threateningly between the fronds of the palms and the branches of the trees. A sense of enduring, of deep security, dwells here at the close of light and, in the sudden peace, the noise of the streets affects one as an echo from another world. It is at such an instant—yes, at such and at no other—that I would wish to take leave for ever of Cape Town and of the Peninsula screened from me behind its parapet of rock.

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V

FIRST GLIMPSES OF EGYPT

COMING up out of the bright sparkle of the Mediterranean on a windy February morning when the sea is breaking around the ship all blue and white and the shoals of sand, stirred from their shallow rest, lie in yellow patches across the waves, one looks upon Egypt for the first time. And, lo, it is not good! A mass of houses terminating in a colourless bare ridge on which a few palms wave feeble heads against the sky—and nothing else. Is this the land of the Pharaohs? O disenchanting and sordid initiation! No meaner sight ever met a traveller's eye. The masonry of the breakwater, a couple of anchored tramps, and some boats dancing out towards the steamer are the only signs of a great port. Alexandria, flat upon the Delta, stretches invisible behind its line of warehouses. It shelves into the sea as a mudbank shelves into a river. And a nearer view does little to disperse this dismal welcome. The opulent streets are without personality, and after a few hours of exploration the sweetest moment is the moment of departure.

It had been raining, I remember, but now as we puffed out of the station on our hundred and forty mile run to Cairo the rain had cleared away and on either side of the track the green, level fields, cut by irrigation-canals, shimmered in the renewed sunshine. All over the land the fellaheen were at work, with their untiring slowness, with their sure and eternal industry. There is something primordial about their movements, suggesting, as they do, the unchanging, patient toil of centuries. And along the paths files of men on donkeys, troops of camels laden with alfalfa

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were passing up and down. A picture from the Old Testament! Swallows skimmed over the sheets of water and plover stood motionless by every glittering pool. In such a scene the first tremor of the East stirs in the refreshed heart; and never can that be forgotten, though its bloom be but dust beneath the evocation of words.

In these low latitudes darkness comes on apace: Scarce has the warning glow filled all the sky than, before you, the blurred images have dissolved into the night. My earliest impress of Cairo was gathered in the glare of lamps and to the sound of jangling bells. Unseen to my earthly eyes I saw it with the eyes of imagination. For its name was as wine within the blood, a fair and fleeting enchantment. Is it not, indeed, a name to conjure with out of the history of the Caliphate and through the long centuries since the rise of Mohammed? But the dream does not outlast the night; with the dawn the Cairo of to-day reveals itself in all its nakedness. It has substituted cosmopolitanism for nationality and surrendered its magic for a mess of pottage. This renowned city of 600,000 people turns itself every year into a caravanserai crowded with tourists and hemmed about by parasites. You can sit on the balconies of its hotels and see the life passing backwards and forwards like a tide. And all unreal! Plunderers and victims, they drift along, spoiling with their alien breath the very springs of romance. That, at least, is the effect produced by the Cairo multitude. I suppose I exaggerate, but exaggeration is still the occasional privilege of a traveller. For behind this army there does exist the other town, the real thing, the horde of a mighty capital. How recently it has had to hide its head you will learn deductively from Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, and how truly it still breathes (when you can but find it) from the sentimental Loti—whose work, I must admit, I take on rumour. But the general atmosphere

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of backsheesh and parasitism is appalling and turns one to stone. The wheedlers of Cairo are innumerable and seem to get bolder at every repulse. They are the modern example of an Antæus. Your pocket is, as it were, the aim of a universal magnet. For myself, I used to find peace in my hotel-garden, where a stork, meandering slowly down the lawns, was my only companion. But, as I say, the true city does exist if you can but escape your phantom and pierce the mask of the unreal. It exists out of sight of European quarters, in alleyways reeking with smells, in secluded mosques, and in the bazaars. It exists and it is worth finding. The bazaars, alone, slow, typical growth of the Oriental mind, repay every disappointment, though I admit that even here a layer of sham has been added for the benefit of people like myself. Still, fundamentally, they are as they have always been.

You come upon them through a network of small streets that enclose, like an outer husk, the living pulp of the core. Slip through one of the dirty passages that open at your elbow and you will find yourself in the semi-twilight of the bazaar. Its arms spread everywhere in an obscure confusion of abrupt corners, dim recesses, hidden roads leading you know not where. The path you traverse is only a few feet in width and it is lined thickly by the stalls of merchants. Here is one that contains nothing but Tunisian slippers of red or yellow leather and here the booth of a perfumer faces the booth of a saddler. Here, again, they barter blankets of camel-wool and here embroideries from India and the Egyptian Delta. Turn down this lane and you will be amongst the metal-workers. Hammering is going on incessantly and spiral particles, all bright from the untarnished brass, litter the way. Here, but a few steps further on, is a man selling cigarettes scented with ambergris and here is a tailor pressing cloth with a foot-iron. Next door is a smithy; an Arab boy is blowing the bellows. On

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the other side some men are pounding cinnamon in huge mortars and its spicy and rather sickly odour infects the air. Here, at the corner, is a shop full of Turkish carpets and next door to it one laden with antiques and illuminated Korans. And turning into a fresh byway you will enter the jewellers' quarter. Here is a case consisting of turquoises in the matrix, carved with golden letters from the Book of Wisdom. Its Persian owner smiles ingratiatingly and beckons you forward. Be firm! If once you accept the cup of coffee which is even now preparing the magnet will have done its work. But if you must buy, remember that prices are matters of adjustment. A last despairing shout, as you disappear, is likely to accept the sum which was disdainfully rejected but ten minutes previously. Such is the bargaining spirit of the East.

By the border of this teeming world, the El-Azhar, largest of Cairo mosques and greatest of Moslem universities, rears itself in the rich and massive disorder of Oriental architecture. Devout students, grouped around their teachers, are squatted upon the floors and the drone of their reciting voices hums in your ear as you step from court to court. Deafeningly, with the fervour of abandonment, it soars upwards out of a thousand throats. From Morocco and Zanzibar, from Arabia and from Malay, the Faithful have been attracted hither to hearken to the Word of Joy. Their looks follow you for an instant with disgust and loathing. You are unclean in the very House of God! Has it come to this that any dog may brush against a Hadji? Out ere I spit upon thee! The eyes of the True Believers burn, their fingers itch. Only many prayers can wash away the defilement. Is the plague of unrighteous men never to cease, O Allah, and are thy servants still to be mocked by the Infidel? One feels ill at ease in such surroundings. The atmosphere is charged. And, indeed, this intrusion of Western scepticism has

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something offensive in it. But the guide urges one forward. A Copt, maybe, or if a Mohammedan probably a sceptic himself. All guides are alike: an unattractive race and very tenacious. One is glad to depart.

The eve of the Prophet's birthday arouses joy in the population of Cairo. On certain waste lands by the city are erected an army of gaily decorated tents surmounted by Islamic pennants. A dense and triumphant crowd surges upon the heels of the mile-long religious procession which sweeps out of the town to offer up its praise. At night-time the fair (for such it is) is a spectacle of pious insanity. In the tents, blazing with naphtha torches, men dance, facing one another in swaying clusters, uttering singular cries, calling upon the name of the Most High. Their set or agonized faces look blanched beneath the gleam of lights. And everywhere the crowd, good-natured, tolerant, unresting, swells over the ground in a solid phalanx. As sightseers, they are exempt from all but reverent pleasure. In tents, set aside for the purpose, holy men are expounding the life of Mohammed, but elsewhere the dancers are still dancing. They will not cease till they drop from fatigue or fall into convulsions. Every description of man is to be found in their ranks, from the spruce gentleman in a frock-coat and tarbush to the ragged peasant from a neighbouring village. But religious zeal has washed away (for to-night) all inequalities—besides, there are many on-lookers. To-morrow we shall be once more in the world, to-day we are at the Gates of Paradise! Rise up, O my brothers, and emulate yonder Dervish, only with louder yells and more frenzied leaps! Is not Allah the Father of us all? . . . I will give you a hint—it is unwise to remain too long: the reek of these perspiring bodies savours of a charnel-house. . . .

I went, I need hardly state, to the Pyramids and the Sphinx but I will say little about them, all having been

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said before. They belong to the Egypt of the dead, to the Egypt of Budge's researches and the earlier chapters of Petrie's *History*. The Sphinx gazes over the desert with a stare, brutish, triumphant, and unconscious, as though in a trance she awaited the return of dynasties and the glut of worship and sacrifice. Pictures well represent her typical expression and that is why she surprises one less than do the Pyramids. For immensity cannot be conveyed in a photograph, and it is the immensity of the Pyramids, as Kinglake found, that stops the breath. No statistics will prepare one for the shock. To be visualized the Pyramids must be seen under their very shadow; then, and then only, do you feel that they will last for ever. I will add nothing more: I am too disheartened. The aloof and noble austerity of both Sphinx and Pyramids has been turned into a kind of vulgar show. The Arabs who haunt them, as self-constituted hereditary guides, are a squabbling, haggling set of rascals, but they are no worse than the visitors who desecrate the scene with picnics and horse-play and whose idea of romance—what shoddiness has not hidden under her skirts!—is to view the Sphinx at night by the flash of magnesium wire. We are all in the same boat. I, myself, have ridden round the Pyramids on a donkey, making the most fatuous remarks. There is, I believe, no end to human folly.

Let me suggest to anyone who is dutifully bound thither for, say, the tenth time that he would do well to alight, instead, at the Zoological Gardens. They lie on the further side of the Nile, a few miles out of Cairo and perhaps half-way to Ghizeh by the tram. No one will regret these squandered hours. Here, by the barren waste, has been laid out and safely enwalled a sweet oasis of water, of flowering bushes, and of pleasant shade. Well do I recall sitting there by the edge of a small lake where swam a quantity of ducks

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and some staid pelicans—not, precisely, pelicans in the wilderness but pelicans uncommonly close to the wilderness. The air had the very softness of an English June. Over the surface of the lake, and from tree to tree, and high in the cloudless heaven flew the wild birds of the place—buzzards and grey-backed crows and burnished doves. The spasmodic laughter of idling Egyptians rang out in the Gardens only to die away in the calm silence of the eve. When I rose to depart, the short, clear twilight had almost faded, bats were flitting to and fro, it was already dark.

These Gardens are the lungs of Cairo, which is, I assure you, the most jading of cities. It affects one with a kind of futile restiveness and discomfort. I soon found that I had had enough of it and I retired, therefore, to Helouan, that desert town, sixteen miles away, so favoured by Egyptian Officials and sufferers from rheumatism. Backed by the low cliffs of the Mokkatam range and fronted by the Nile, which flows some miles to the west, it is yet completely encompassed by sand. From its streets you walk straight out into the waste. There is no line of demarcation—the roads end in the desert. Its 8,000 inhabitants enjoy sulphur baths and a most glorious air, but what they can do with their liberty passes my comprehension. For the desert is not a playground. One palm, set in rank grass in the midst of sand, entices visitors to a drive, but surely you cannot call that an urgent attraction? For my own part I would rather explore the Mokkatam hills, a silent, stony and dreadful land, from which the old Egyptians quarried for their pyramids and which are riddled visibly with their excavations. You can walk for mile after mile in this blasted expanse without encountering a soul. There is no shelter, no blade of grass, not even a vulture hovering in the blue, but only the powdered rock and crumbling cliff of uttermost desolation. The days of Paphnuce and the devil-jackals of Anatole France are

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gone from Egypt. Yet it has its attractions, as the circles of Dante's Hell are attractive in the very horror of their contorted symmetry. But enough. . . .

In the early morning a delicious freshness blows into one's room from the cooled desert. It is good to rise while the rosy light is still widening in the east for soon the heaped-up sand will reflect the sun's rays with violent intensity. Only in the first and last hours of daylight is the desert bearable. I used to sit on my balcony after breakfast and listen to the croon of building doves and view the trellis-work at my feet, where clumps of purple bougainvillæa were in bloom. All was quiet. Even the donkey-boys on the outer road had not yet started shouting. In the pure, warm air, in the pensive indolence of content, a mellow drowsiness would reawaken the dreams of the night. But nothing endures. Discomfort, the slayer of rest, was at hand and invariably, under its drastic guidance, I would retire indoors to shelter myself and await the evening. That is the time when people walk out over the desert in the direction of the Nile. Across the river the pyramids of Sakkarah stand up sharply and far on the right are to be seen the vaster pyramids of Ghizeh. The track of the Nile is marked by a thread of silver and by the green fields of its irrigation. Nothing could be stranger than the way in which you pass suddenly from arid havoc to the most active fertility. Out of sand you step as directly into fields as out of Helouan into the desert. It is the Delta over again, with its artificial waterways and bounteous harvests. Everywhere men are working, animals are cropping the grass. The roads are alive with traffic; the valley of the Nile supports an unsuspected population. Near by, amidst a group of date-palms, snuggles an Arab village, typical in its dilapidated appearance of any Arab village of the Moslem world. At this hour almost every creature in sight is slowly converging on it. Men and women, donkeys and cows, sheep and

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goats, buffaloes and camels, they stream in aimless disorder over the flat landscape.

The cultivated land does not appear to be more than a mile in width and it is no great business to walk forward to the Nile itself. Rather broader than the Thames at Chelsea, it flows languidly, the old river, as though irked of fame and weary of beneficence. At this floodless season the sight is unimpressive and, apart from association, dispiriting in its dingy waste. Upon the surface of the current feluccas with their lateen sails set are moving up and down. The water ripples listlessly beneath the breeze; the subdued tints of dusk have overspread the sky. Oh, sad finale of anticipated romance!—the scene is not even interesting, it is commonplace.

Someone has been so enterprising as to build a restaurant here on the very banks of the Nile, where, on moonlit nights, a dinner may serve to throw a glamour upon reality. I only hope so, but I have not tried it. I know that an iced drink did not have that effect.

But if you would regain Helouan before it is dark it is time you were turning. Already there is a change to the afterglow of sunset. Frogs are beginning to croak in the canals and the roads have emptied: the village has received back its children for the night. Looking across the desert, you will see Helouan, extraordinarily defined and clear-cut, rising as a white arm thrust above the sand. One by one lights twinkle out upon its front and at each moment it grows more ethereal as though presently it would all melt away like the frail splendour of an apparition. And upon the desert, itself, you may observe a string of camels crawling, small as flies, at right angles to your line of vision. It is a Bedouin cavalcade setting forth by night for distant Suez. At your back, beyond Sakkarah, beyond Bedreshein and all that remains of ancient Memphis, a deep red glare is fading out of the

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sky. The sunset of the desert will soon be over: are not the first stars shining already?

I had the habit, when tired of wisdom, of going into Cairo by the afternoon train and of returning in time for dinner. I don't quite know why, unless it be that a bored person is willing to throw himself from the frying-pan into the fire. How well I remember issuing, in the dry heat, into the courtyard of that out-of-the-way little Cairo station. Just to see the stand of cabs, with the old worn horses almost ready to kneel between the shafts, was sufficient to make one collapse with fatigue. The very epitome of the sham Cairo! I would hire a cab, drive to Shepheard's, and drink a cup of tea upon the balcony; or, if I had energy still left, perchance I would go as far as Heliopolis (but not in one of these cabs!), that new suburb whose desert-waste is crowned by the most resplendent of all hotels. It is curious to sit upon its terraces and see the sand around you, level and trim as where the tide recedes along the Brittany coast. This palace, reared upon the wild, looks huge even for the requirements of a Cairo season. Possibly it may attract its thousands, but I have never seen it anything but sparsely occupied. It was not, I fancy, built as an hotel, but certainly its designer must have been an optimist with his eyes fixed upon the sheer bulk of the Pyramids. It will go and the Pyramids will remain, but it may leave behind it a legend of frustrated ambition. The whiteness of its stone is not its only link with the whiteness of a white elephant.

Thus my afternoons would slip by and lucky for me if no friendly instinct suggested the propriety of a call. A residential address, however plainly and frequently enunciated, means nothing to a Cairo cabman. As long as he goes fast he thinks that all is well. Whether this be on the principle of the ostrich with his head in the sand I leave to some practical judge, but I must aver that, without exception, these cabmen have

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the brains of rabbits—or ostriches. Indeed, there is something feeble about the whole Egyptian race. They care for nothing very much, not even their religion. The fanatic Moslem of Cairo is seldom a native. Tradition and love of notoriety make them earnest in ceremonial but at heart they drift like butterflies. They have not the manliness of the Turk. Of course there must be exceptions—that's a truism—but in a population like this, where the level of intelligence is not high, the exceptions, themselves, will be fewer and kept to a narrower orbit. The Egyptian is the kind of person who learns quickly and fails in a crisis; but then many people are like that.

I never stayed late in the city, though I understand that, to the exotic, its night-life offers attractions that are almost fantastic. Minute descriptions of its more private entertainments have been given me at various times and I have elsewhere heard a man express passionate indignation against one of his friends—I had not known him ten minutes when he unburdened himself to me—who had insisted on their leaving a Cairo performance when a remarkable item had just been announced. This unnecessary confidence put me into rather a false position but I succeeded, I hope, in maintaining an air of sympathetic impartiality.

"What exactly was it?" I enquired.

He told me.

"You certainly missed something," I remarked weightily.

"Yes, I should dam' well say I did! He's spoilt the whole of my trip for me. Look, there's the fellow over by the door! Now, candidly, would you have thought he was that sort of man?"

"Well, you know, it's a difficult question."

As a matter of fact he was not "that sort of man," but I wasn't going to commit myself. He was middle-aged, one of these men you can see any day

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hanging about Piccadilly, with a dull, complacent face, fish-like eyes, and a protuberant stomach. I think he must have left the show under a misapprehension.

"I wouldn't," muttered my new friend malevolently. "Just think! The affair was actually beginning. Actually beginning! And who's he to pick and choose? He's not a parson! Bah! Naturally I couldn't make a fuss before all these niggers. An Englishman has to behave himself abroad. And here I am cheated out of a thing like that! What chance have I of seeing it again? Eh? Now you just tell me!"

I really couldn't tell him; besides he was worrying me.

"But I did see some things," he murmured vaguely.

"I suppose so. But excuse me if I have to leave you now; it's time for my walk."

So absorbed was he in his grievance (which I don't want to minimise in any way) that he paid no attention. When I got up to go he followed me with gloomy, preoccupied steps.

"I shall never have another chance," he mumbled indignantly. "What does he take himself for—a parson?"

I made no attempt to solve the riddle but increased my pace. I might have saved myself the trouble as it was quite impossible to shake him off. During the whole of that afternoon I had to listen to detailed accounts not only of the episode in the theatre but of the performance which he did *not* witness. Yet I feel sure that he was fortunate in not witnessing it—reality could only have been a disappointment to such an imagination.

May my readers palliate this essentially truthful digression. It refers to a Cairo that has, I daresay, vanished for ever. An Occupation and a Protectorate are very different things. But who knows? Old customs die slowly.

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But, truly, my knowledge of this side of Cairo is only hearsay. When I lived there I wanted quiet above all and when I visited it I left before the shades of night. It would be dark by the time I got back to Helouan and the men, in their evening-jackets, would be moving about the steps smoking a last cigarette before dinner. Feminine laughter could be heard from upstairs. Everything was carried on with English decorum in that desert-town: the hotels were filled with our countrymen and life had the appearance of a rather seedy county society in unwonted environment. It was not very diverting, but the long meals (where contact was inevitable) were saved by the most excellent snipe shot in the Nile reeds.

I had entered Egypt by the gate of Alexandria and I quitted it by the gate of Port Said. A triangle with its base upon the sea. It is an attractive four hours' journey, this to the eastern port, taking one out of the Delta straight into devastation. And, behold, in the midst of sand, like some bizarre phenomenon, appear all at once the masts and funnel of a boat steaming through the Suez Canal. The line, edging closer, gives you a glimpse of its sea-water, so blue within the ring of brown. Dredges are at work, pouring out their slime into the wilderness. And away beyond the banks a mirage has settled upon the waste, changing it into a milky sea with fairy islets sprinkled upon the foam. You look at it with wonder and delight, at that opium-vision sea, and turning you perceive that the true ocean is now upon your left—an ocean rolling sadly upon a bird-covered tract of mud. Appearance and reality! And now, as you watch, the oil-tanks of Port Said show up across the flats. It is time to assemble your packages.

There is nothing worthy of note about Port Said. It admits to a bad reputation and has, for its size, an even larger stock of improper photographs than Brussels or Buenos Aires. I am able to look after

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myself, but there is something objectionable in being accosted every five yards by a man who urges you to "step inside" when he will show you some photographs that are "very good"! I will only remark that if they are better than the ones in the windows they probably are very good. And actually that is my main recollection of Port Said. It lives in my mind as a row of photograph shops out of which leering men dart, like spiders, upon the passer. Is this a humiliating confession? If so, I am sorry; but, at least, I am truthful. Everything else loses itself in the haze of a toneless afternoon. But the smiles of these men persist. Avaunt! The temptation is really too crude.

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VI

SEABOARD AND FOREST OF BRITISH GUIANA

I OWE it more to accident than design that I ever set foot in British Guiana. I had proposed spending the whole winter in Barbados but as time progressed the devil of boredom woke in me that other devil, the devil of restlessness, and, suddenly remembering my friends in Georgetown whose last words had been an invitation, I resolved to go to the southern Colony. It is only a day and a half's steaming and on a certain morning of December I landed at the mouth of the Demerara and made straight for a boarding-house which had been recommended to me in Bridgetown. These tropical boarding-houses are odd places, kept, as often as not, by prim, elderly ladies from England who suffuse an atmosphere of Dulwich upon the torrid disorder of the South. This one answered to that description. It was haphazard but it was respectable. Its bamboo furniture had that weariness typical of boarding-houses and the motto of its proprietors was, probably, " Home from Home." Not, indeed, that I made very much use of it (though one is so adaptable that all the oddity had disappeared in twenty-four hours), as it came to be, in my active life, simply a place for sleep and breakfast. But I cannot recall it even now without imagining myself in some incredible London suburb.

I gathered up my friends and with one or other of them I explored this city of 50,000 people. A well-laid-out city it is, with broad, parallel streets and canals flowing in the midway. The old Dutch settlers left their mark on it and the English have built upon their foundations, though they are gradually filling in

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the canals where now the lotus and the victoria regia spread over the still water. Perhaps they are wise, perhaps these pools breed the dreaded anopheles, but with the last canal will vanish something picturesque and good out of the past. The city is flat and in its innumerable gardens the vegetation soars, green and red, against the white-walled houses. A steamy heat hangs over it by day and at night a swarm of moths and insects struggle round the shaded lamps. Frogs bellow in the lagoons. The air trembles in this awakened life and far off the tide is heard rolling upon the sea-wall. This is the hour when men assemble at the Club to imbibe green swizzles. Who knowing that alluring drink will not feel the heat freeze out of him for a moment at its mere name, and who, having tasted it once, would not taste it every five minutes of the night? It is very insidious. . . . Many and many an hour did I spend in this admirable club, whose proud boast it is to have not a serious rival in the West Indies. Fair fortune befall it!

On the outskirts of Georgetown lies a tract of wild Botanic Garden through which a sluggish stream winds to the sea. In this reserve, that gives so well the false impression of illimitable size, one feels the breath of a South American forest. The great trees tower above the tangled bushes and in the silence of the open spaces there is quietude as of the noonday jungle. A romantic and beautiful spot, made fertile with water and gladdened by the hand of art. How timelessly the afternoon wears away, with what sense of peace in the deep solitude! But, look, the sun is beginning to sink behind the trees, the reeds are stirring, and the night is here. Let us depart.

Towards evening people straggle out on to the sea-wall, that fashionable promenade where the band plays on Saturdays and where the breeze comes faint and tepid off the Atlantic. It stretches, solid and straight along the shore, from Georgetown to the

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forest, and the Dutch who built it for their protection must have imagined that Demerara was a second Holland. In the falling light there is something melancholy in this picture. Yellow and torpid the water flaps upon the wall, as though all the mud of the interior had mixed itself with the brine and killed the energy of the waves. Carriages cluster around the band-stand and only a few wandering couples have approached the forest. And soon they, too, will have gone and the old sea-wall, like some forgotten groin of the East Coast where the sand is silting and the waders wheel, will share its desolation with the mourning sea. Yes, somehow or other it reminds me of the Norfolk coast. The savannah behind me might be the saltings about Wells, that forest the Holkham woods, and this dull sea the impregnated tide after a week of storms. If the comparison seem far-fetched, remember that comparisons are suggested by emotions.

But here comes one you will not find in Norfolk, an Indian, thin-legged and grave, who walks noiselessly over the stones and carries a little net. He is a fisherman and he will be content with but a small catch. He has entered the water now and he stands motionless, gazing downwards. Is he searching for fish or is he thinking? I would like to speak to him but I have not the courage. He is probably a coolie who has worked out his indentures and has elected to remain on in the Colony. There are many such. Of the 300,000 inhabitants of British Guiana, about 100,000 are Indians, and as the rice grows well in the flat coastlands they can live here and flourish. Of the remaining population, there are, perhaps, 3,000 English, 14,000 Portuguese, 10,000 natives, while the rest (excluding a few Chinese) are negroes and half-castes. A strange assortment! The native, the dweller in the interior, seldom appears in Georgetown. He is a nomad, a hunter, a fisherman, and he ranges the jungle as his fathers ranged it before him. The tribes

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have given up fighting and live in sullen acquiescence. If they aren't impressed by civilization, at any rate they're frightened of policemen. That's one way of going to work. All the same, they are treated with great indulgence by the Government and have rights in the forest which no white man possesses. They may be bewildered by some laws, they are certainly protected by others. But I daresay that's true of all of us.

Practically the whole life of British Guiana centres itself in those plains that border the sea. This is where sugar grows, and rice, and cocoa. The riches of the forest lie waiting for the future and the wilderness is untapped. There is constant talk of a railway into the interior and some day it will materialize, no doubt, but meanwhile the Colony remains undeveloped and is panting for enterprise and capital. The coast alone counts for anything. That has yielded sugar-fortunes in many a year gone by and can still do so when prices soar. I had a friend who owned a sugar estate a few miles from Georgetown and I walked out there one afternoon to watch the crushing of the new crop. It was a curious sight. A series of canals radiated from the factory into the plantations and now, along them all, piled-up barges were crowding upon the entrance. The cane was tossed up into the crushers and a stream of liquid sugar poured along the runnels. I cannot describe the processes, here where it is mixed with lime, here with sulphur, and here where it enters the vacuum-pans, but I know that, as I watched, I sucked a piece of fresh cane and experienced, at last, the real, ripe flavour of the raw sugar. By an ingenious device the boiler of the crushing mill is fed by the eviscerated cane or megass, which is economical for the owner but, so far as the sugar is concerned, heaps insult on injury. I went upstairs and there, on the floor of the loft, lay a pile of brown "Demerara" crystals. I took up a handful

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and I ate it—almost the first time I had been able to eat brown sugar since, as a small boy, I had hidden in the store cupboard at home and overgorged myself in scandalous secrecy.

My friend and I walked back to Georgetown together and as we were crossing the little bridge that spans the creek outside the city he said to me all at once, "By the way, there's a fellow lives here who wants to sell me some books." He pointed up the creek-side to a cluster of dilapidated houses. I suggested that we should go and call on him and we eventually did this. We did not find him in but we sat down to await his coming, while a coloured girl rushed off to fetch "the master." The recollection of that room remains with me still in all its grime and disorder. I have never seen a place that spoke more eloquently of hopelessness. Outside, a few hens scratched in the weed-grown courtyard and about our heads flies buzzed in the stagnant air. One instinctively had the idea that the proprietor was lying somewhere out of sight, probably in a barn, wide-awake with his eyes shut and straw in his hair. It was a beastly hole! After a time a perspiring and unkempt man of about forty-five sidled into the room.

"You have come about my books, gentlemen?" he asked, smiling apologetically and nervously as he glanced from one to the other of us.

"Yes, we have come about the books," answered my friend.

"Ah, gentlemen, you know I hate to part with them—but my circumstances—it's a set of Hakluyt—do you know Hakluyt?—a great man, one of the greatest of the Elizabethans."

He was in a state of suppressed excitement, he regarded us with a sort of cringing eagerness and despair.

"Here's one of the volumes—have a good look at

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it, it's Maclehose's reprint—I say, excuse my asking, the set's worth £12, isn't it?"

I took up the volume and found that it had been riddled by silver-fish. I could only shake my head.

"What, you mean to say it isn't! Oh dear me! You see, they haven't eaten where the print is. I thought it would fetch £12; but never mind."

He appeared stupefied for an instant, but suddenly, lifting up one of the volumes himself, he began to talk about Hakluyt's position in the world of travel. He was an enthusiast and a student. It was a pleasure to listen to such a man. As he spoke his face seemed to shine, his cares to vanish, and the sordid quiet of that room to echo with the murmur of the sea. But he stopped as he had begun, and with a painful, slow smile on his face he bade us good-afternoon. Who was he and whence had he drifted? Is he living still in that house above the mud, the neglectful dreamer, or has he gone to join the navigators of old? . . .

An active social life gives the visitor to Demerara full opportunities for gaiety. Riding, tennis, dancing, and dining are always to be had and the colonists cling with tenacity to the precedents of the Mother Country. But what surprised me was the general contentment to leave the interior unexplored. The inaccessibility, the lack of conveniences, the expense, are, I suppose, more or less insuperable. The wilderness cannot be cajoled—it stands, as it were, without the gate, whispering, "Thus far and no further." Perhaps I, also, would have remained on the coast (in fact, the "perhaps" is a mere compliment to myself) but for a lucky chance. I was having tea one afternoon with the Bishop of the Colony, when he announced his intention of going up into the interior on a pastoral concern. It was only to be a short trip; would I care to accompany him? I needed no pressing, I can assure you. And so it was arranged.

On a morning of still warmth, ere yet the sun had

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mounted high, with the further banks of the broad Demerara all apple-green beyond the brimming river, we boarded the little Sproston steamer that was to carry us to Wismar. I had brought with me only a bag of clothes, the Bishop, in his kindness, being responsible for everything else. His black servant was in attendance. We were to escort a lady, a missionary for the Brazilian frontier, to the jumping-off ground of civilization, and she now arrived, a frail woman of about forty but of a fearless courage. (If it had been Waterton, the eccentric, or the adventurous im Thurn I could have understood it.) The boat sheered into the current, stemming the great river with the beats of her stern-paddle. The sun rose higher and glistened upon the brown waters that bubbled in our wake. Presently we went below and had breakfast, the stand-by, as usual, being the Guiana "hot-pot," into which everything goes, the remains of yesterday serving as the foundation of to-day and chillies casting their spell over all, and after breakfast we sat out beneath the awning. About eight miles above Georgetown the banks wilted away before a belt of broken forest. Produce barges and rafts bearing underwater loads of greenheart floated idly down stream. The lower reaches were alive with the morning activity of the market. Here we edged inshore to pick up or put down a few coolies, and here a Hindu wedding party went by us in a garlanded boat. Gradually man's traces grew less and less and for hours before we reached Wismar in the afternoon we had been steaming through a deserted river. Wismar, itself, is a mere cluster of shanties. We disembarked, had tea, and boarded the train which, through eighteen miles of forest-track, brought us from the banks of the Demerara to those of the Essequibo. In that hour's run the unheralded darkness had descended and when we got out at Rockstone it was in the pitch of a tropical night.

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A launch lay moored by the edge of the Essequibo and stumbling thither we packed in it our camping materials for the morrow. Then, in the blackness, we took our uncertain steps towards the rest-house, whose lights twinkled upon the edge of the forest. The coloured housekeeper, with a bandana round her head and a motherly smile upon her face, greeted us on the steps and ushered us to our rooms. It was a comfortable, one-storied house with very fair accommodation, and after we had had a bath and a meal we went out on to the wooden verandah and talked. The Essequibo glinted beneath us, flowing away with the smooth silence of a tide. Reflections of a thousand stars shone upon its surface and we saw where it eddied like pale silver round an island in mid-stream. And above that stillness, in the solitude of the wild, the night clamoured and whistled incoherently about our ears. Never have I felt more acutely the mystery and vastness of an unknown land. That water, stealing out of the forest, was like a thief stealing guiltily off from the buried treasure of a continent. It was not a time for words and our voices had gradually ceased before we rose to go to bed. We were to make our start at six-thirty in the morning.

At five o'clock I woke up and padded out on to the balcony in my pyjamas. It was yet dark, but a profound silence had fallen on the earth. The voices of the frogs were hushed and not a faintest breath of wind stirred the sombre outline of the wood. Before the first glimmer of the dawn the stars were dwindling in the sky and round the bend of the island the river swept cold and stealthy in the shadowless twilight. It was the hour when, in the tropics, the pulse of the exhausted night beats slow and nature rests in the heart of brake and jungle. But even as I watched a tremor passed over the ground, a colourless tone expanded above the trees, and the birds began to chirp. The day was opening her lids.

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The housekeeper moved uneasily at the back. I thought it time to get dressed and returned to my room. When I emerged again our breakfast was ready for us on the balcony. We had hardly swallowed a mouthful when the launch gave a warning hoot that thundered over the Essequibo and the waste. We gulped down the remainder of our coffee, ran along the shore, stepped on board over the heads of half a dozen negro pork-knockers (men who wash for alluvial gold), and sat down in the tiny house-boat, the *Ark*, which was lashed alongside the launch. Another hoot woke all the sleeping echoes and then, in the widening day, we pushed into deep water and skirted southwards along the island. In all that expanse ahead there was not a vestige of human labour. A towering wall of forest closed the water's edge and stretched away, unbroken and green, upon the long curves of the river. The Essequibo mirrored it upon its bosom and in that clear serenity it was hard to say where sky and water met. The throbs of our six-cylindered engine beat loud upon the noiseless stream and a furrow of tea-coloured wavelets undulated behind us and marked our momentary stride upon the wilderness. In this solitude only the river seemed to live. A few parrots winged overhead flying to their feeding-grounds in the depths of the wood, a few yellow butterflies drifted across from shore to shore, a few arapaima or caymans splashed under the banks, but that was all. (Yet who knows what beady thicket-eyes were watching us unseen?) And in silent contortions, in a riot of twisting roots and twining lianas, the forest drank in the sunlight and fought heavenward. Trailers hung from its branches, corruption crept about its feet, orchids with airy tentacles blazed in its green foliage. It seemed to breast the water in dumb fury and, like some Polyphemus confused and blinded by the river, to raise impotent, fierce hands against its destiny. And yet above this soundless warfare there dwelt a

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feeling of utter tranquillity. How can I conjure before you the dazzling peace that lay upon the world in the coolness of the morn? Ah, that were impossible! In the muteness of the forest, in the quietude of great spaces unknown to man and heedless of man's toil there is balm for the soul.

> "Authentic tidings of invisible things;
> Of ebb and flow and ever-during power;
> And central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation."

Far from the boundaries of humanity, in the wealth of the flowing river I tasted the cup of oblivion to man's cares. It was like drinking from the fountain of all.

After a couple of miles we rounded the island and shot out into full stream where the Essequibo was, perhaps, three miles broad. A reach opened before us, immense and placid, with a sand-bar in its midst and the forest leaning upon its either flank. We passed it, and another circle of the river loomed ahead, losing itself in the sinuous rampart of the trees. Reach succeeded reach. As the day advanced the heat became tremendous and I had constantly to be quenching my thirst by scooping up draughts out of the river. The Bishop's servant had gone forward and was preparing lunch over a wood fire upon an iron tripod. He had brought supplies of plaintains, eggs, and so on from Georgetown and soon he provided us with a fine repast. This finished, I managed to get some sleep under the awning till about three o'clock, when we made our first halt, at Omai Landing. To my astonishment, a witness to man's unrest, in the form of a miserable jetty sticking out in the slack of the current, suddenly showed up upon one of the banks. We edged alongside and I saw in the clearing of the wood a veritable Chinese store by which a Celestial smoked in stony unconcern. Good Lord, what a contrast! An old man came tottering down

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to the jetty and exchanged a few mumbled words with our negro skipper, the pork-knockers filed on shore, depressed and silent, and with no word spoken above a whisper we went on our way. In another minute all these puny signs of man's activity were obliterated in the monotonous splendour of the landscape.

Towards evening the river contracted greatly, a light wind sighed in the forest, and a leafy murmur floated out from the shore. The parrots were returning and in the dusk a million tree-frogs struck up the overture of the night. A mist stole across the water, the banks blended and deepened, and we had to pick our way with care. We were late at the camping-ground, but a watch had been kept for us and we knew that all was well when an Indian in a canoe slipped across our bows and hailed us in a sibilant call. We stopped the engine and allowed the boat to drift in under the branches. The Indian had jumped on shore and I saw his shining eyes fixed on us from out the canopy of leaves. He had two pins stuck through his lower lip and his face had the typical Mongolian caste of the South American aboriginee, with almond eyes, high cheek-bones, and straight black hair. Our party landed and the launch puffed off into the darkness for Tumatumari. For long we heard her beats upon the invisible Essequibo.

A steep and muddy path brought us to the encampment of the Indians. It lay in a clearing of the bush above the river and an air of fortuitous permanence had been given it by a wretched attempt at a cassava plantation. The smoke of cooking-fires shone ruddy and, as we approached, a lot of nasty yellow dogs came sniffing round us and had to be driven off. (It's never wise to walk about those camps without a stick.) The Indians took our arrival very calmly; the river-party had been waiting here for days and we were fully expected. As we stepped into the ring

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of light they gave us one incurious glance and went on smoking or cooking. Some of the men were despatched down-hill for our stores and meanwhile I accompanied the Bishop on a round to administer quinine to the inevitable cases of malaria. The huts were primitive, open on all sides, mere roofs to keep out the rain and poles from which hammocks could be swung. But the largest had a kind of upper storey reached by a ladder and here we had a belated dinner of bush-turkey and cassava bread. When this was over the Bishop assembled the Indians of the escort and offered up a few prayers, which were loudly and fervently interspersed by the " Amens " of his listeners. Whether they knew much English is open to question, but they may have thought that piety and porterage jobs went hand in hand. There was something touching and grotesque in this little night-service, held so simply in the heart of the jungle. The words of faith and hope, the promise of divine protection and of eternal rest, sound grander in the wilderness or sound more mocking than an echo. But I don't suppose the Indians saw any incongruity or, indeed, felt anything at all. They are not given to general ideas and they probably regard white men as foolishly incalculable. I forget to which of the four roaming tribes these men belonged and I carry away no hint of their minds. Perhaps they were the Indians of that elfin book, *Green Mansions* (though Hudson has never been in British Guiana), perhaps they were members of a less cruel and vindictive race, but, whoever they were, they are to me equally inscrutable.

Soon afterwards we retired to rest. I recall how I awoke in the middle of the night and, raising my head, stared keenly about me. Recumbent Indians slept in their hammocks and the ashes of the burnt-out fires lay in cold, grey heaps upon the ground. The forest, like a patient listener, stood without the clearing, ready to take a step nearer. A chill was in

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the air. I wrapped myself closer in my blanket, and, turning over, went to sleep again.

Morning had hardly come before we began bustling to and fro, making preparations for the departure of the missionary. The long Indian canoe was packed with provisions—mainly biscuit tins—until her gunwales sank dangerously low, and at ten o'clock she glided out from under the bank and started on her three weeks' journey into the interior. If I remember rightly, thirteen men, three women, and a dozen hens (whose string-tied legs were already entangling themselves round everything on board), accompanied our friend on her adventure. When I consider that this lady had not yet been a month in the country, that she knew no word of any Indian dialect, and that she was prepared to face unknown perils and loneliness, then I begin to realize something of the power of Faith. Several years later, meeting the Bishop in England and enquiring as to her state, I learned that she was then actually in London, lying desperately ill from fever caught on the high borders. Indomitable soul!

The Bishop and I had not long to wait before a distant hooting announced the return of the launch down-stream. It is needless to describe our journey back to civilization. I lay reading a tattered French translation of a novel by Dostoievsky, and as I lifted my eyes from it to gaze upon the receding forest I could not but feel how fitting an external background to this story of chaotic passions was made by the giant disorder of the wild. One titan seemed to face another: in Dostoievsky the regions of the heart are as trackless as the jungle itself. . . . We slept that night at Rockstone and on the evening of the second day alighted on the wharf at Georgetown.

Thus did I penetrate the outworks of Guiana. But only the outworks. Real expeditions into the interior are the luxuries of the rich. Mount Roraima

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with its spiders I shall never see, or the record Falls of Kaieteur. I had thoughts of organizing a party, but they failed before a row of figures. Still I was to blame in that I had a chance of visiting the Lamaha Stop-off, the enclosed lake which supplies water to the capital, and did not. For this lake is also a bird-preserve, and the bird-life of the Colony, as you may judge for yourself from Chubb's monograph, *The Birds of British Guiana*, is of the most various nature. There is a Natural History Museum in Georgetown and not only is the ornithological section representative, but even those on the lepidoptera, coleoptera, and orthoptera appear reasonably good. They are constantly sending boxes of new specimens for nomenclature to the South Kensington Museum: this is one of the richest lands for the intrepid collector and hardly the East Indies themselves could yield more thrilling captures. The life of a collector, the life of a modern Bates or Wallace, with its triumphs and its consolations, what a life that must be!

As I say, I had a chance to visit the Lamaha Stop-off and I did not use it. Instead, in a mood of singular irrelevancy, I suddenly decided to return to Barbados. At that time I had no idea that the microbe of double-malaria was already in my blood and that I was doing the wisest thing I could—no, I was merely acting on an impulse, and a pointless impulse at that. Bidding hasty farewells to all my friends, I departed for the docks and was heard of no more.

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VII

THE FRINGE AND HEART OF SWAZILAND

AWAY in the eastern Transvaal, where the high veld beyond Ermelo slopes down towards the mountainous border of Swaziland and the railway is a thing forgotten, there lies a great farm of 60,000 acres which has seen three generations of the same family of British settlers and is still conducted on the patriarchal system of another age. Driving over twenty miles of withered veld, thick with ant-heaps and devoid of life, you debouch suddenly upon the edge of the plateau and look beneath on an extensive valley whose watered greenness merges into the blue of hills and whose scattered plantations of gum and wattle denote the busy work of man this many a year back. In the midst of the valley, shielded by its trees and prominent above as a towering plantation, there nestles the homestead of the estate, a long low building of grey stone (it was once the seat of a fugitive Government), where true African hospitality is dispensed and where I have passed week after week of undiluted peace. "A traveller never created a famine," says the Swazi proverb, and my friends have improved upon it by making a visitor not merely accepted but welcome. A sensation as of the pause of things begins to emmesh you as you descend the hill. The cattle are feeding on the coarse grass and the springbuck raise their heads as one to stare at you in surprise. It used to be a famous place for buck, this valley. In countless thousands they streamed down from the high veld in winter and the paddocks could be seen alive with game. (Even now the upland sheep are made to follow each year in the wake of the buck; for weeks together the solitary tracks are thick with the droves.) But the buck-migrations are a thing of

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the past, for there are none left to migrate, and were it not for the fencing that encompasses the estate for miles this spot, too, would have shared the fate of the surrounding country and have been entirely shot out. As it is, the Boer War left it almost denuded. When that opened some 4,000 blesbuck and some 2,000 springbuck roamed perpetually within its borders, but when the settlers returned all the blesbuck had gone and scarce a dozen springbuck remained from out the original herd. Nothing can come from nothing so the blesbuck are still no more, but that dozen springbuck have swelled into a round six hundred. As you ride afield they are about you on the ridges, scampering away from you with quaint leaps that show the white strip down their backs and along their curled tails. These and the little oribi, that jump up on every side and make off with wooden bounds, are the commonest wild sights upon the farm, but, indeed, the place is still a game reserve of note and seven species of indigenous antelope yet find shelter here.

As one descends the hill, I say, one feels the peace of the broad landscape. It is not that it is beautiful in itself, save for that first view from above, but that its spacious air and its remoteness from the world create this feeling within the disturbed breast. It is the kind of country whose vast, vague outlines baffle description and whose very essence can but sink into you in imperceptible gradations. To describe it in any real way would call for the placid, cumulative volume of an early-Victorian narrative, and I am reduced, therefore, to a choice of selected moments in the hope of giving in this short space some coherent sense of the picture. The historic present, which, I admit, is usually the result of a false dramatic instinct, comes to my aid in the intensity of my recollections and, seeming once more to sit upon that stoep, I feel almost as if the past were awake and I were filling up a current diary.

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Every day the routine of the farm would bring before my eyes new pictures in the kaleidoscope of the year's swift course. Cattle trooped in from the outlying portions to be dipped and sheep headed by their solemn goats, horses were rounded up and taken off to the Dutchmen's farms for breaking-in, the calves were branded, the teff cut, the beans gathered, and a ring of veld-fires, guided and guarded by Kaffirs with green branches, were started on the outskirts of the estate. Each morning the farm showed the same picture of unceasing and apparently haphazard energy. The maize-mill would wake me and the yoking-up of oxen distract my thoughts. All the processes of the farm, unhastening, essential, went on around with the unnoticed detail of accepted custom. These boys will stop here for a few years and then go home, marry, start households of their own, and spend most of their remaining span basking in the sun. On this large property native kraals are sprinkled at wide intervals under the protecting hills, and there are probably four hundred beings here who regard the dwellers at the big house as the final appeal of justice and authority. Untouched by the restlessness of towns and having in their own lives the assured knowledge of a safe and easy existence, they keep but the ambitions of their forefathers in the satisfaction of simple and natural desires. They come, the heads of kraals and their wives, trotting over weary miles of veld to lay their grievances and sorrows before their white masters. There is one on the lawn now, an old man with scrimpy beard and beeswax circlet round his head, sitting motionless as a stone. Perhaps a cow is sick, perhaps a daughter has run away—we shall know all in good time. This is the old fellow who lately devoured a jackal the dogs had killed on the flats. The younger men would not touch it, but he had no such qualms, and on being asked how it tasted only remarked that though it was certainly a little bitter it was still *meat*. But even the

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natives are changing and the generation to which he belongs is on its last legs. . . . The white family of whom I speak have rightly earned the confidence of their dependents. Their attitude is one of paternal friendship in which there is no hint of familiarity. They treat their natives as human beings, but as human beings who are at once more childlike and more incomprehensible than themselves. They do not try to bridge the difference by making the natives grasp the white point of view, but, rather, in attempting to gauge their attitude they see how unbridgeable the difference is. This way of handling natives can, apparently, only be learned by an instinct of upbringing and is as unlike the bullying methods of some as the "Black Brother" nonsense of fools and agitators. It is the perception of a difference in similarity and of a similarity in difference. . . .

I remember that as I emerged, once, from the dead blackness of the avenue behind the house and gazed forth upon the lit-up spaces of the sky I was seized, as I had been seized before, by the curious fancy that the very spirit of Africa was about me in the air. Under the glitter of the southern stars she had risen, the bereaved mother, calm and majestic out of the earth, to mourn uncomforted. Night, which in the mysterious cycle of man's activity has come to signify the double victory of love and death, seemed to have summoned her forth in the inappeasable hunger of her desire. The melancholy of departed life and lost activities abides upon the wastes of Africa, and who knows how far the spirit of her quiescent restiveness may not be responsible for the discontent of her present generation? Africa is like a bride who yields her body to you but not her soul and whose mental reserve but fans a hundredfold your desire. The comparison may be far-fetched, the mere exaggeration of a poetic licence, but in the ceaseless disquiet of her people may there not actually be present the reflex of

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the land herself? She beckons you on and on, away from homely delights and the comfort of four walls, and the pioneer's will-o'-the-wisp is the lure of her enchantment. Years cannot quench the ardour of the seeker or time reveal the riddle of her personality. But men grown old in Africa hear her calling louder as they near their end and those touched by her fever return again and again to quench and to kindle afresh the sweet and bitter craving that is her gift.

No books of which I am aware really help towards a comprehension of this inner Africa, but here, writing of the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland, I would quote two delightful works by Fitzpatrick which deal with the country around Barberton and have a certain quality that is rarely attained—*Jock of the Bushveld* and *The Outspan*. They are not exactly masterpieces, but they will give you a better idea of the land than any historic compilation or account of big-game slaughtering. But, putting atmosphere aside, how often are the very points that strangers want to know avoided in volumes of informative travel! One misses those elaborate details which, working up to a complete presentation, bring before the reader the true aspect and significance of another realm. I have felt the need too often, but I have done little to fill the gap....

A night of rain and distant thunder has given an unusual freshness to the air and the smell of the earth steams up over the veld, scented and strong, out of its living grave. The hour has thrown off the leaden closeness of the last few weeks and the sparkle of the vanished rain seems reflected in the very notes of the garden doves. It is a morning in which the whole world rejoices in renewed life, in which the spring takes one of its visible strides, in which the heart grows young once more with the mixed pain and pleasure of youth in memory. Ah, to-day one ought to ride far over the veld where the delicate spring flowers are beginning to push up through the

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young grass of the " burns " and the buck are nibbling about the orchard shoots. Spring is in the air, that enticing moment of the flowing sap when young men's fancies lightly turn, etc., and cynical age exploits the optimism of humanity. But on this farm I am free from its temptations, if not its yearnings. I am quite content to bask in the sun and imagine what I shall do to-morrow. Swiftly pass the hours, unrecorded, to return no more, and I can well understand how the dreams of ambition cease at length to be anything but a soporific. Like the tremor of the year's new life awakes the idealism of other days. But just as romance flourishes best in the thought of contrast so does idealism grow more tangible in the pursuit of reality. I have never found any pleasure in the intercourse of cloistered or precious minds, and spring is, itself, only charming as a natural landmark of wheeling time. Everyone here goes about his work with the same unhurrying, unresting tread, the sense of the marvellous distils itself without intent, and external and internal existence are merged together in a sensation of physical and mental wellbeing and sanity. To feel acutely one does not divorce oneself from the life of one's period and place; one merely finds beneath the surface a rarer and more elusive emotion.

When the shooting season was on I liked to take a gun and go forth every afternoon on foot or on horseback. One evening I was returning laden home and had sat down for a few minutes to rest in the middle of the veld. The day was drawing to its end in the perfect repose of a blue and windless eve. Light clouds hung like becalmed ships in the sky and all the eastern horizon swum in purple tints above the deeper purple of the distant Swazi hills. A plantation of old wattle trees broke the extended ridge of the upper veld and away beneath me the level evening beams were as bronze upon the plain. For ten minutes I sat there

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inert, the Kaffir boy crouching behind me and the dog quartering the adjacent ground, and as I sat the spirit of the hour, like a mellow and ancient liquor, stirred in my blood. Then rising to go, with the francolin calling around and the hadada ibis wailing overhead, I saw that the sun had already set and that the west was cold and colourless as water in which a mere drop of claret has been distilled. This kind of picture does not fade.

The exigencies of space must close these selected moments and in the passing of the historic present the perspective of the whole leaps once more before me. It is all there, the life and scenery of the farm, the underlying unity, and I feel again the hopelessness of any compression. And what have I said of humanity, of the white family who govern so wisely, of the Royal refugees from Swaziland (were we not waited upon by the daughters of Princes ?), or of the half-bushman, Bismarck ? Nothing. I have said nothing, and, there being no excuse, I will drop the subject and carry you with me into actual Swaziland.

I had so often viewed from afar the mountains of the Protectorate and on so many a night had watched the ridges flare and fade that it was with a sense of almost unreality that I drew near at last to Swaziland. I seemed about to plunge at a bound out of the prosaic eastern Transvaal into a land of secrets whose barrier lay across the sky like a portent or warning against rash adventure. The journey was not too pleasant. At Carolina I had taken my seat in a yellow Ford car, so devoid of ornament, even to a bonnet, and so full of rattling, that it had the aspect of a gigantic and irritable insect crawling with loud buzzes over the veld. It really did have it. In this car, then, I made the eighty miles to Mbabane, a journey not altogether uneventful on account of various breakdowns and the consequent violence of the driver's language. We had proceeded for some distance when the car suddenly

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refused to go. After tinkering at it for half an hour the driver, who had been indulging in unrepeatable asides for several minutes, observed bitterly:

"What do they want to send me out with a thing like that for?"

"I quite agree," I chimed in; "it's a scandal. The car wouldn't fetch £10 as scrap metal."

My sympathy did not appear to placate him. In fact, we had hardly broken down again when he began:

"How can I be expected to do anything with you making remarks of that kind?"

"I beg your pardon," I answered; "I thought you meant something like it yourself."

"Me? Why, what's wrong with the car? The car's all right. It's my car, isn't it?"

"I'd no idea," I mumbled apologetically; "from your conversation I quite imagined——"

It seemed wiser not to finish and the discussion languished there and then. A few hours later, however, he clinched the whole subject by one prophetic explosion. He had just succeeded, for no conceivable reason, in getting the back right wheel into a rut about two feet deep and nine inches across alongside a barbed wire fence a full fifteen yards off the track, when, dismounting to study his handiwork, he summed up the position in these words: "I *knew* I ought never to have started out."

He was an amusing person in his own line, almost as amusing as another gentleman I travelled back with, a public hangman, who, on being asked how one of his executions had gone, remarked affably: "Oh, it all went off as sweet as a nut"—an observation, somehow, that strikes one as being rather less reassuring than it sounds. . . .

A singular change and grandeur becomes apparent in the scenery before you cross the border at Oshoek. Stony hills rise about you, with abrupt, deep valleys

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fringing the track, and the tame high veld has yielded within a few miles to wild and tumbled gullies. But it is when you are once actually in Swaziland that the climb begins in earnest; up and up you go upon that winding pass until, launched upon the summit, you behold Mbabane lying away beneath you in the clutch of its mountains. It was on a jewelled morning that we slid down towards the capital, which looked then its bravest, I think, with the houses of the officials perched upon the slopes and its little main street clean and washed after the last night's wet. And, yes, the promise of its distance was not altogether a chimera. With its peculiar mountain air and that fresher air of something more truly British than the Union can ever show, it gave me, in very truth, a sentiment of having passed, all at once, into a new land and a new atmosphere.

Mbabane is, so to speak, the centre of all things Swazi and its primitive conditions and diminutive size are, assuredly, only comparative. Here is the seat of Government, of society, and of the amenities of life. Here are to be found the blessings of electric light, of a three-times-a-week postal service with the outer world, of a school, a doctor, and an archdeacon, and here, too, is situated the tin mine which, alone of Swaziland industries, swells the revenue by an excess profits tax. Hence naturally radiate the influences and powers that guide, more or less, the destinies of 90,000 people. A friendly and hospitable social existence gives to Mbabane a charm of a kind not to be found elsewhere throughout the Protectorate. Indeed, on such a day as this one could hardly ask for a pleasanter spot, with its twisted hillside roads, its gardens kept trim by convict labour, and its upland meadows bordering the streams, but when the fogs come down and the soaking rain turns all the roads to mud, and day itself is made dark as night, then, maybe, one might remember with regret the comforts of a larger town.

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But physical life, alas, cannot emulate the one and the many of Plato's discourse.

From Mbabane the road descends, at first steeply, into the interior and through undulating country one traverses the two-and-twenty miles to Bremersdorp. Second village and former capital of Swaziland, it is, within my experience, a place lacking altogether in beauty or personality, and my time there was sufficiently dreary to be willingly obliterated. It is the kind of dead-alive corner that an unfortunate man might get to accidentally and never get out of again. The proximity of the kraal of the Paramount Chief—"The Queen's Kraal"—which is but eight miles distant from Bremersdorp, has given the neighbourhood a large native population and the kraals of some of their most eminent leaders are clustered near by. I visited one of these, on the top of a hill five miles without the village, in the blaze of a hot afternoon, and was received by the head, who was a person of importance in his own land and held an hereditary post at the Swazi Court. His two uncles, shivering old men with foxy eyes, crouched beside him and a crowd of wives and retainers stood respectfully in front. The chief, himself, was of middle age, with an expression of heavy boredom and an air of indubitable authority. His orders, given in a kind of dull and muffled whisper, were obeyed unquestioningly and he had the manner of one who had never been contradicted. His reception of me was courteous but without enthusiasm and his shrouded eyes seemed to look beyond me upon the long emptiness of his days. On leaving I was presented with a dish of maas, a sort of curdled milk made in a calabash, and I may here state that mealie pap, a roast leg of buck, and a plate of maas compose a meal—and will compose many of your meals if you live on a Swazi farm—that requires some beating whilst the novelty remains.

I rode thoughtfully away from that kraal; there

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was a dignity and aloofness about those natives that contrasted favourably with the sham and chattering Europeanism of the christianized Swazi. Amongst the heathen, alone, who compose, of course, the overwhelming majority of the nation, the unplumbed echoes of the past still reverberate in a thousand customs and superstitions that could not but assure to the co-ordinating anthropologist a strange insight upon the common infancy of mankind. The Swazis, I fancy, have not been studied in this respect to a sufficient degree, and a philosophic grasp of the origin of their beliefs and the significance of their actions is apt to be lost sight of in the mild interest of intermittent curiosity or in the desire to rid their minds of false doctrine while clothing their bodies in cheap raiment. Yet, in the fantastic ritual and mental processes of savage life there is probably naught without a meaning, lost though it so often is in the quarry of the years, and it should be the task of intelligent observers and scientific men to collate the facts and work therefrom to a theory of primitive civilization whereby much might be made plain that now appears obscure or imbecile. In considering their attitude one must remember that the elementariness of a kraal existence is deceptive. Vague fears and complex observances, which through the growth of ages have developed into a second nature, govern the lives of a race whose reaction to our own culture is utterly ineffective. But this is a subject that requires a knowledge and technical skill I do not possess and I only mention it here in the hope of encouraging others better qualified than myself to pay closer attention to a tribe daily becoming more contaminated by the influence of white ideas and modern systems.

South-eastwards from Bremersdorp the road follows its mountainous course down to the tropic bushveld where stretch the great cattle-ranches on whose acres the game still ranges at leisure and where I have,

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myself, seen impala feeding in a glade within a hundred yards of the track. McNab's store, that old landmark of the lawless times, sentinels, as it were, the door of the low country and thence, for a good twenty miles, you proceed through a park-like forest of stunted trees, an uninhabited and lovely tract, until there looms before you the vast Lebombo, ascending which in spiral sweeps, scattered, red-roofed Stegi comes into view upon the summit. This is a settlement of some prominence, the seat of an Assistant Commissioner, and, being situated but eighteen miles from the border of Portuguese East Africa, is accessible to Delagoa Bay by a not too remote railway. The range of the Lebombo, a plateau in itself, spreads southward towards Zululand, and from its edge you look down upon the flats you have just crossed and far beyond them to the hills and the opening of the big river. On a still morning, when the drawn moisture of the earth dapples the ground and the vibrant air trembles and expands, the closely-dotted trees emerge like the wavelets on a stirring sea and the stupendous reach of the low country lies open beneath you in the whispering quiet of the wilderness. It is a sight full of the beatitude of immense and shining landscapes.

The kraals are gathered thick in the native territory along the foot of the Lebombo and, riding down amongst them by a cattle-track that takes the face of the mountain at a leap, one was made quickly aware of the illusion of all things in the scenes of death and disaster following in the wake of a world-wide epidemic. The doctrine of Original Sin which, in the midst of this universe, would endow man alone with the nemesis of an inherent defect, was borne powerfully upon my mind in contemplation of so huge a misery. But it was not the occasion for abstract speculation. Here, as elsewhere, we did what we could, and if it was not much (in spite of the humane and far-sighted energy of both Government and private individual throughout

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the Protectorate), it may be explained by the extent of the evil and the superstitious preconceptions and fatalistic apathy of the natives. I repeat, one was made conscious of illusion as one went from kraal to kraal on that day of splendour. Between the bushveld and the hill, in the delicious land along the border of the stream, a grisly plague had taken its toll and left behind it mounded graves and lingering disease. As I rode back at sunset I saw two ancient Swazis filling in earth over the latest victim—she who had died in my arms that morning. They squatted, that old man and woman, at either end and, like beings out of some primeval tragedy, they spoke not as with palsied hands they shuffled in the soil. All around, the deceitful, fair world wore its most smiling countenance, as though the taint of death renewed to it once more the promise of eternal youth—except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die. . . . Yes, I can truly say that if it had not been for the fine hospitality and congenial company of my hosts I would recall Stegi, in spite of its situation, with a kind of horror and aversion. But, as it is, the pleasure will survive when the pain has been forgotten. Such is the compensation of life and memory.

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VIII

FULL SUMMER ON THE ISLE OF SARK

GUERNSEY should be approached while morning light suffuses the east and all the rocky islets between Jethou and her shores stand forth like ghosts upon the lifeless water. The shadows of the dawn flush pink and grey along the walls of Castle Cornet, and the houses of St. Peter's Port emerge in gradual tier on tier above the pale rose of the widening sea. It is the hour when mystery lies strong upon this least mysterious of islands and when you might imagine you were approaching one of the Hesperides instead of a glorified suburb on the brine. I have been several times to Guernsey and have always quitted it with exactly the same feeling of boredom. The eastern coast is steep, with fine views towards Sark and all the midway isles, the western coast is flat, with an extraordinary fringe of puny reefs stretching far out upon a dangerous sea, but, as for the interior, that is incredibly dull, a mere assemblage of small holdings and small dwellings, interspersed with glasshouses of every size where they ripen grapes and peaches and tomatoes for the London market.

St. Peter's Port, itself, is a town too utterly uninteresting to deserve a description, though its high outskirts contain some old houses and old gardens that are rather attractive and though its chief hotel, once the seat of Governors, is grandly situated above the harbour and the ambient streets. But its main attraction, I think, is Victor Hugo's house, a regular museum of bizarre and precious things and so typical in its disordered magnificence of its one-time owner that you might almost expect him to appear suddenly from behind the arras or walk through his gem-like garden to the deep's calm edge. These sunset views

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of isle and sea must have inspired many a line and this queer jumble of a home have comforted the poet in his exile. But one cannot spend one's days climbing to an eyrie or dozing on the lawn of an hotel, and there is, really, very little else to do. Coaches start from St. Peter's to carry one over the manifold island-roads, but there is nothing particular to observe and you will not want to make any of the journeys twice. . . . With this rather unpromising introduction let us escape to Guernsey's rock-bound neighbour, Sark.

The island of Sark lies several miles to the east of Guernsey and is reached through the narrow channel between Herm and Jethou—Herm which has a German Prince (no longer), kangaroos, and rabbits for inhabitants, Jethou which has only rabbits. Cleft pinnacles pierce the inner seas round Sark and the little steamer feels its way within the reef, hugging the cliffs, until it enters the tiny port of Creux, which, with its beetling, overhanging brows and line of needle-rocks in the outer roads, is one of the quaintest of wild havens. A tunnel cut through the solid stone leads upward to the otherwise inaccessible table-land, and the tide, running high about the island, sweeps into the harbour and takes the fishing-boats, heeling over on the mire behind the shelter of the mole, upon the swift rise of its flood. Once through the tunnel, a sharp ascent carries one rapidly to the summit of the isle through great banks of tawny hillside. A day's walking would reveal to one every point of this small Seigneurie, whose whole extent is three miles by one and a half and whose area is but 1,274 acres. Yes, a toilsome day might make you think yourself acquainted with Sark and two months' further exploration would prove to you that you had been misled.

To the tameness of the other Channel Islands Sark presents a savage exception. It is like a dinosaur that has survived the Deluge, has watched a

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physical downward evolution, and is now dying inch by inch from the crawling waves. It is one of those places as elusive and curious as a vision, a spot insignificant in size immense in contours, barren for human life vastly fertile for marine, and with an atmosphere at once powerful and delicate. An heroic hand has shaped its bleak, bare shores and even the pettiness of its interior has the variety of the eternally fierce and free. In the fullness of summer I stayed there for many weeks and I can truly say that on the day I left it remained as much an enigma and a delight as on the day I came. Its few sparse acres are, verily, like the mirage of a great, lone land within the confines of the English Channel.

And yet, anomaly as it may appear, there is something snug and cosy about Sark, a ship-shape tightness, and mentally you seem to hold the island within the compass of your hand. That, at any rate, is what I felt and what my companions felt. There were four of us and we lived in the farmhouse of one of these diminutive farms which cover the locality. The owner, the woman who cooked for us and cooked well, was a little cunning old person who, with her two speechless sons, was completely representative of the Sark character, that character which is French and not French, British and not British, and is an odd mixture of the sly and dour and friendly. Some five or six hundred people reside permanently on Sark, fishermen and farmers, who speak a halting English and a dialect French, and the head of this community is the Seigneur who dwells in the one house on the island worth the name, an old house and a charming, backed by woods that slope to the water and fronted by a walled garden that might have been transplanted as it stood from the southern counties. There was only one defect in the happiness of our farm-life and that, candidly, was the presence of fleas in unseemly numbers. A subject for a joke, I know, but no joking

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matter in itself. Search for their origin led me to suspect the two dogs, fat brown Toby, thin white Tiny, who abode on the premises, accompanied us everywhere, and indulged in the most impassioned scratching during their spare minutes. Still, though not a joke it was not a tragedy, and if two of us were driven to sleep out of doors the sleep was sound. Leaning from my window of a night I would see the glow of their candle through the tent and the vague, fantastic shadows of their movements. The murmur of voices rose somnolently through the dark and, dying away on the sudden extinction of the light, left me the sole watcher of the swept and pitted heavens. Peacefully I breathed-in the warm island air, browsing in thought over the vanished day, till, full of languor, I, in my turn, blew out my candle and laid me down.

In the glorious summer of 1913 our time slipped by unheeded. Each morning we would descend the narrow, winding path to d'Ixcart beach and there, undressing behind the boulders, would wade gingerly in over the stones and take a short swim in the icy water. Dry and clothed once more we reclined, tingling, against the sheer wall of the cliff and allowed the sun to warm us as we smoked. We could trace the shadow creeping round towards our shelter, and I have yet to experience another pleasure like that of those cigarettes snatched from the very jaws of time. For it was the sun alone that made our position tenable, and as soon as he had gone we had to follow him uphill. The ascent was harder than the coming down and was easiest made in laps. Resting upon the heather-slope we saw the sea below, with patched colours above the sunken rocks and foam creaming around the protruding ledges. A perfidious and hazy calm spread over the water and the sharp upjutting crags had the aspect of friends guarding the entrance to the little bay. It seemed as if the anger of the elements had been appeased for ever.

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We did our shopping at a village store a quarter of a mile from the farm. There we would buy apples and Worcester sauce and cake, and there we would meet the society of the island collected for the mails, loud-spoken visitors in flannels or tussore silk, uncommunicative Serkais in weather-beaten navy blue or black stuff dresses. And occasionally we would go down to Creux and watch for the steamer to puff round the headland and make its circle for the toy harbour. That was always an amusement, always something eagerly awaited, as though the fussy little boat had been a link with another world. You could tell when the passage had been rough by the wan expressions and the streaming deck and you could see that Sark had not been overlooked in trade when a French onion-seller came ashore with his nut-brown face, tam-o'-shanter, and strings of merchandise. It was fascinating to sit and dangle your legs while all around was noise, and I, for one, got plenty of enjoyment out of Sark's daily crowded hour. Cabs rattled down the hill, and contemplative fishermen, ready for the tide, leaned over the gunwales of their boats and smoked their cutty-pipes in silence. Europe in miniature suddenly invaded the rocks and, drifting beyond the tunnel, left them as suddenly to their old repose.

On most afternoons we went fishing. It was a two-mile walk, first through lanes and then over the crown of a long hill looking to the sea and slanting to the water's level. In single file, holding our rods erect, we strode along the ridge with the dogs trotting at our heels as though they knew all about it. As soon as we arrived we had to start collecting bait. Amongst the lower rocks, covered with slimy seaweed and treacherous in hidden pools, the limpets clustered thick and awaited the reviving tide. Unless you could get your knife-blade between the shell and the rock at the first attempt you had to beat them off with stones and we never felt safe for the afternoon till we had gathered

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several handfulls. Not that they were really satisfactory bait, for if you didn't flick them free in your cast the fish were likely to lick them free without damage to themselves, but they served as a beginning and as a standby. The finest bait was a horse-mackerel, and once we had secured one of them we knew we were pretty certain of other mackerel and deep-bellied, yellow rockfish. Our catches, as such, were poor—it is a different thing fishing from a boat at Sark—but the very scarcity added zest to every capture. The dogs lay upon the rocks and scratched, the little shoals sailed by, and, as for ourselves, we diversified our fishing with explorations along the shore. We even tried bathing once, but we found it much simpler to glide off into deep water than to get back again. There was a swell upon the sea and each time, as we were being thrown up high and dry, the suck of the receding wave would pull us down and we would bark our shins on the jagged rock. They were great afternoons! Once, I remember, when we knew that the tide would be full on our arrival and that we must bring our bait with us, we had the brilliant idea of saving one of the mackerel and putting it carefully away in a sack ready for the morrow. But on the morrow we did no fishing, and it was not until the afternoon next following that we started for the point. We did not forget the sack and the sack's victim did not forget us. Tucked out of sight, the mackerel protested vehemently against such treatment, and we only got him to the sea by holding him at rod's length, in alternate spells, and breathing through our mouths. Now the irony of the story is that hardly had we placed him on the rock, ready for slicing—if, indeed, you could have sliced him in the state he was—than a mongrel dog, a friend, maybe, of our friends, appeared from nowhere and gobbled him up. He must have been very sick afterwards.

The shape of Sark is roughly like that of an eight,

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of which one circle has been drawn much bigger than the other. Great Sark (on which we lived) is divided from Little Sark by a causeway some twenty feet broad and two hundred yards long, named the Coupée. From either edge of this singular rampart a precipice, perpendicular on the one side and abrupt on the other, falls to the encroaching sea three hundred feet below. This natural bridge lies in a hollow between the two halves of the island, a hollow growing perceptibly deeper in the waste and erosion of the land, and seen from any quarter it is a sight of formidable impressiveness. It was down the abrupt, but just possible, side that we used to clamber to a beach strewn with famed and precious pebbles. The four of us went stooping to and fro, and a sudden shout, causing the unsuccessful searchers to raise their heads, would announce the discovery of a supposed treasure. Under the glisten of the sea-water the pebbles shone like the rarities of a mine, though, as a matter of fact, we never lit upon any of the more unusual sorts. But I still keep a cardboard box full of "finds," and when I want to recreate these days I have only to dip them into water and watch how the light gleams back on their dulled face. . . . Sometimes, too, we would bathe beneath the Coupée, the sand of whose beach was a welcome change from the rocks of d'Ixcart. Boulders strewed the bottom of the cliffs and floating seaweed showed where the sandy floor was dotted by rocks head-under to the tide. It was an attractive place in the sunlight, but sombre and cold in the fall of shadows; and we were glad to climb again to the level as the sun hid beyond the point.

In the eve and dusk of summer a hush as of well-earned rest fell upon the island. We used to lie out on the borders of the fields, under the banks of whin and bramble, and let the settled calm give us a due appetite for supper. Much coaxing was unnecessary, I admit; our widow knew our wants and we lived on fish and

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eggs and were content. Now that I think of it, I wonder why we didn't have lobsters and crabs as well. The Channel Islands are the select home of crustaceans and in Guernsey I have feasted on them as nowhere else. Indeed, all the life of the sea flourishes in this region. Crested cormorants and stormy petrels build upon the uninhabited rocks round Sark, conger weighing fifty pounds apiece lie in the deep-water holes, and the caves of Boutiques and Gouliot, these honeycomb caves that are eating away the island with the action of sea on decomposing granite, glitter in a mass of coral-lines and zoophytes. St. John, himself, never had dream of heaven more fabulous than the heaped riches of that dank and twilight world.

From the centre of the island the regular boom of a distant bell-buoy could be heard when the swell of some Atlantic storm rolled up Channel in the ominous quiet of the restless sea. In the mellow stillness of a night without wind it struck upon the ear like the echo of some raging chaos beyond the boundaries of our ken. Standing beneath that starry sky, in the dark warmth and dimness of the road, we have strained our senses to catch the warning note and have felt, suddenly, the security of our isolation in the munching of near-by cattle and the earth-smells of the fragrant soil. In that comfort our thoughts turned naturally to sleep and even the activities of the unspeakable could not keep us from our beds. . . .

The people of Sark are not a roving race, and strangers who have visited the island once generally return thither. I have even seen a party of youths, clerks from the north of England, I fancy, who were camping out in its fields for the fifth year in succession with a paraphernalia of tents and telescopes suggestive of a desert island. But, in certain respects, Sark is very far from being a desert island. It is intersected by roads, it has three hotels, and—surest sign of long inhabitation—its every point and rock and

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cave has a name and a tradition of its own. Nor should we omit the two cannon at the Seigneurie, presented to the then lord of the island by Queen Elizabeth in the sixteenth century. Sark has been civilized for a thousand years, and a thousand years from now it will be wild.

Is this the reason, perhaps, that two of the most extravagant geniuses of the last century, Hugo and Swinburne, should have felt drawn towards it as to a third member of a grotesque and mighty Trinity? Swinburne in rhapsodical poems, Hugo in the rhapsodical prose of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, have sung the wonders of the deep and the monstrous beauty of the seas round Sark. It is, however, a little disappointing to read in Nicolle's revised edition of Ansted and Latham's standard work, *The Channel Islands*, that Hugo's terrific account of the pieuvre or octopus (which, he declared, grew to its greatest size in the Sark rocks) is more imaginative than correct. As they dryly remark, "The French author's story is certainly a gross exaggeration."

I have spoken of our activities, but I would have you understand that we also spent long days in simple basking. To find some heathery nook above the sea and lie there staring at the heavens or at that other blue of the ocean fitted the humour of many an afternoon. The slope above the islet of Brechou, with the speckled race beneath and the gulls wheeling above our heads, was a favourite post and lazily would we follow with our eyes the smacks sailing out towards the sole-grounds in the Channel. Then, again, there was Baker's Valley, secluded and still, where the trees half-hid the sky and the ferns were green as in some Lowland dell. And then, as I have said before, there were the sunny bramble-banks, from whose incline only the fields showed to the idle gaze and where you might think yourself far from the sea and all the toil of men.

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Yes, Sark is an island in which to forget, for in Sark the future and the past are alike of no account. It is an island of oblivion.

The undermining of Sark goes on perpetually and it is only a matter of time before Great and Little Sark will be wholly separated and before the gnawing waves will have brought down vast masses of the overhanging cliff. Slowly and constantly is Sark crumbling and those fearful holes in the earth, like the Creux Derrible, bring in the relentless sea from tide to tide to wash and beat upon the stone and bear it forth in fragments. Not in our lives, nor in the lives of many generations, but eventually, in far-off days, the whole fabric will dissolve and Sark be blotted from the map. It would be a solemn thought, this thought of even so distant an annihilation, if, in the precarious brevity of our own existence, we did not feel the bootlessness of worrying over future destinies. Already one of my three companions on Sark is dead, killed in the North Sea at the hour of victory, and somehow I should not wish to return to the island with the knowledge that he could return with me no more. On wider spaces a memory might dissipate and fade, but on an isle like this it would grow more poignant and fresh and all our old delights be tainted with regret. Ah, there was a man well worth remembrance, a big man in every way, a commanding presence! He was by nature silent, rather inscrutable, with an ironic tinge to his able and balanced mind, but he was sane and healthy as few are sane and healthy in these latter days. England can ill afford to lose such sons.

The thought that I can only recall his splendid personality here in a few unrevealing and wooden sentences makes me see the futility of a book even so definitely confessional as this. One is completely bound by one's plan. Moreover, I suppose all authors consciously or unconsciously create certain moods. As I sit writing these impressions I throw, ever and anon,

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a kind of side-glance on myself. Where, then, is the easy judge of manners and places, where the tolerant traveller, where the boon associate of all sorts of people? Everyone can "get on" with himself, everyone can throw, mentally, prudence and proportion to the winds. But actuality is different. I want to bring a figure before you—it would take fifty pages; I want to give the real details of ordinary life—it is not "done"; I want to describe things in a special manner—I have used the phrases before. A great nuisance!

You will find in Sark a curious desire increasing upon you, the desire to explore everything, to leave nothing unseen, to leave nothing unknown. You must follow each road to its end, you must visit every bay and every rock, you must learn the lie of the island as if it were your room. And the exciting thing is that you never will know it all. No, never. Even the familiar places are new upon the following day, and as for the places you have not seen before, they well up as the oil welled from out the widow's cruse. This is neither fancy nor exaggeration and the secret of Sark's appeal is the gift by which it conquers boredom. One cannot analyse the vitality of the inanimate, one merely accepts it and weaves around it a whole theory of emotional life. Sark, for me at least, is a peopled entity. I am not sure that I make myself explicit, but the unique quality of the island hardly permits of logical demonstration. It's like trying to elucidate the taste of a strawberry or the special odour of a carnation. The thing is there and obvious, but it is for each to make the discovery for himself.

This longing to know everything about Sark extends, not alone to its physical features, but to the constitution and life and history of the island. Legally, Sark is to a large degree an appanage of Guernsey and the Seigneur is only a magistrate for trivial causes. But, as such, it has its own Court presided over by the

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Seneschal, the Prévôt, and the Greffier; and the law is upheld by a Vingtenier and a Constable. Resounding titles! There is also a Court of Chief Pleas with forty members who are the owners of the forty "Indivisible Tenements" into which the island is divided. No man, I believe, may possess more than one of these tenements under any circumstance, and a democratic equilibrium is thus established. It is a system that deserves study, and though, possibly, only suitable to a primitive organization that may but go to prove the good sense of the primitive. The recorded history of the island is meagre enough. A few evidences of cromlech builders still survive, while the first authentic annals point to it being the home of monks or anchorites, and the latest, the resort of tourists! It came into the possession of England in the reign of John, was retaken by the French in the reign of Edward IV., conquered anew in the reign of Mary, and finally colonized afresh from Jersey in the reign of Elizabeth. Since then, happily for the isle, history appears to be mute. . . .

Our party broke up little by little. First one had to return to London. We gave him a cheerful send-off by going over with him to St. Peter's Port, which was like plunging back into the riotous excitement of a metropolis. Then, a week later, another took his leave. We saw him off from the shores of Sark, we two that yet remained, watched regretfully the flutter of his handkerchief as the motor-boat sped out to sea and rounded the island by the Autelets rocks, and returned to our farm-breakfast with the cheerless certainty that summer was, indeed, over and that all its hours were dead. Yes, it was over in our thoughts and dying inevitably in the late year.

In her infinite variety Sark is like a woman, and throughout the summer weeks she had been like a woman when she first loves and shows her dear one only the yielding grace and tenderness of her character.

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But always one felt what you might name the deeper feminine beneath, the capricious hardness of moods, the soul that never truly reveals itself in its most abandoned revelations. And now, at the end of our holiday, when the air of a chill autumn came wandering over the island and the grey Channel fogs hung like a curtain upon cliff and sea, one knew that the first love had gone and that a change was at hand. It was useless to linger, just as it is useless to beckon to emotions that have fled, and we also packed and prepared for departure. Toby and Tiny stood on the breakwater and wagged mournful tails as we steamed outwards for the last time and swung round for Guernsey and England. And on the morrow, the lonely Casquet rocks, whose lighthouse, white and premonitory, protects with its flash and tolling bell the traffic of the western ocean on that route of sunken rocks and reefs that foam unseen, gleamed for an instant above the sea and faded in the mist. The outpost of the Channel Isles was passed!

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IX

COAST TOWNS OF SYRIA, ASIA MINOR, AND GREECE

STEAMERS leaving Port Said for the Syrian coast carry many a strange assortment of the devout. For this is the gathering-place of the Christians of the world. The traveller is fortunate who gets a berth that night, though, indeed, his trials will be but short-lived. All these elderly Swedish ladies in tartan shawls, these English clergy, these Canadian priests will go ashore next morning at Jaffa and, hurrying forward to Jerusalem, will be lost to him for ever. I remember that I had been slightly dismayed at the crowd that had come aboard at the entrance to the Canal—a crowd amongst whom curio-dealers, jugglers, and Jewish money-changers from the Arabian littoral spluttered and performed—and with what a sigh of relief I had watched them going over the side the following day. I, myself, had had a notion of visiting those scenes but had restrained myself and from the deck surveyed at leisure the red-tiled town of oranges. A pleasant-looking spot from the distance, with green fields around it and sloping land beyond, but what it is like in reality I cannot say. When we weighed anchor again we were a small party and time passed smoothly enough. It must have been towards evening of the next day that we reached Haifa. Beautiful from the sea it rises, shelf upon shelf along the hill, like some old fortress city of southern Italy. But there was no opportunity for landing (which, perhaps, was as well), and in darkness we left it behind, its lights twinkling at us as we sailed onwards to Beirut. That town received us on a morning of clear sunshine, and with the wind blowing in my face I went

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straightway on shore. It was the first time I had set foot in Asia.

Yes. But to tell the truth, the Beirut which lies about the port, and which is all of Beirut the casual voyager ever sees, does not impress the imagination. It is simply a mean and dirty slum, quite without personality and full of mangy dogs. The Beirut of the high outskirts is a very different place, a place of gardens, with roads winding past dark woods and with vistas of swelling hill. Up there the balmy night falls noisy with the croak of frogs and the stars are reflected in a hundred reedy pools. How little could one guess of its existence from the bare dreariness of the lower town!

Beirut is not a city of many sights and few there be that linger within its portals. If you let them, they will drive you along the north coast to examine some stones covered with ancient inscriptions. But the drive is uninteresting and so are the stones. No, if you want an excursion go southwards by that road above the cliffs which, turning a sudden corner beyond the town, displays in one breathless sweep a panorama of hill and sea. Blue and stainless the Mediterranean dips to the horizon, and at your feet, in the white ooze of the unheard waves, the ancient highway of the universe washes upon the beach of its largest continent. That is a picture to reward any jaded eye. I liked to go there of an evening when fashionable society was passing and re-passing in its carriages and when the glow was warm above the mountains of the Druses. It was the hour of peace after the dust and discomfort of the day; one awaited there the imminent night in a still quietude of space and freedom.

On these upland fields I used to observe burly men lurking with guns in their hands, and, in the general unrest of a fanatical population, there was something ominous in the sight. I asked myself whether an

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attack upon the Christians was brewing. But the answer was trite. These men were merely on the hunt for small birds. Never have I witnessed such a display of grief in two beings as I did one afternoon when a lark rose just out of range. I had watched their suspense, their whispered conclave, the craftiness of their approach, and now I watched the agony of their despair. (But take heart—that bird will return; all is not lost!) It was exactly like a scene in a pantomime.

I was sometimes accompanied on these drives by a Syrian gentleman whom I had met in a railway train and with whom I had become very friendly. He was a man of about forty, stout and prosperous in appearance, and he was given to confidences of all kinds. As we lolled back on the cushions he would unfold to me the unfortunate intricacy of his financial affairs. Gambling in Liverpool cotton options, at which he had once made £3,000 by an exceptional fluke, absorbed his attention and his money. According to him, it did the same for most of the inhabitants of Beirut. He would consult me as to his career and I would advise as best I could, but, never having been particularly successful myself, I really hardly knew what to say. He would then branch off on to the subject of his wife and four children (more delicate still), and occasionally I would even accompany him home to sample his Eastern hospitality while I pondered upon the problems of his destiny. He was a nice fellow, ingenuous and astute, and beneath his red fez he tried hard to show a European mind.

They were rather curious evenings, those I spent at his house. His wife was a stout and tranquil blonde and her children used to peep at me with owlish eyes from behind her skirts. A sort of airless comfort governed the abode; the food appeared upon the table smeared in oil and batter. My broken French had to suffice for conversation and I could never think

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of anything to say to my imposing hostess. But they finally produced a dissolute-looking Englishman who had a fondness for arac and was the originator of a gambling system that was invincible "if only one had the capital." My Syrian evidently despised this rather equivocal individual and kept eyeing me whimsically as though words of wit and wisdom were about to issue from my lips. Perhaps they were—who knows?—but in that cursèd French I was reduced to platitudes. The gambler droned on about his phantom future, the arac circulated, and I achieved a series of noncommittal smiles. They were more successful than I should have thought possible and seemed to add to my already high reputation for worldly wisdom. A gratifying memory!

If left to myself my evenings went by in a spirit of boredom. I did once stroll down to a café chantant where French girls alternately drank your wine and mounted the stage, but it wasn't even improper. Gilded vice, indeed! No, I was actually less dull in the stuffy little sitting-room of the hotel where one could, at any rate, exchange elaborate bows with the gentlemen of the tobacco régie. And looking out of the window one saw the dark mystery of the sea and felt its breath upon one's cheek. There was a flat roof to the building and there I would pace at leisure and watch the harbour lights beneath. But how gladly I used to retire to bed, and how gladly, if the truth were known, I heard that my boat had arrived.

A couple of days' steaming, touching at Rhodes and coasting Cyprus, carries one to Smyrna, which lies deep within the shelter of a bay. Its houses stretch along a wide sea-front and, spreading backwards over the flat area of the city, wander around the bay and up the slope of the hills. The harbour is full of loading and discharging steamers—Smyrna is the centre of an active trade. It is a de-orientalized city; The hat is more common than the fez and a veiled

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woman is an infrequent sight. Greeks abound everywhere. You might almost fancy that this was a Greek town in which the Turks had got a solid footing, instead of its being the reverse. Especially is this true at night when the theatres are ablaze and Christians fill its European cafés. Only its horse-tramway, its rough-paved streets, its lack of telephones and electricity suggest a place behind the times. But the distinctive quality of Smyrna is a brisk cosmopolitanism. The slow bargains of the Arab have vanished before the swift, small profits of another race.

In the search for an hotel I made acquaintance with a fellow-traveller, who became my companion both here and in Athens. To great benevolence he added a certain cynical disbelief in mankind and a dry humour that was very attractive. He seemed to have complete faith in only one person, a friend of his, Mr. B., who entered into all his conversation with the elusive effulgence of a Mrs. Harris.

"But who is Mr. B.?" I was finally led to enquire.

"He's a very remarkable person—he's a philosopher."

"And has he written anything?"

"Written! Don't you know? He's written that book on the influence of psychology on the Sunday School movement."

Now, isn't that a work I should like to possess!

With this new-found friend and an Austrian guide, who said he knew English and didn't, I went to Ephesus one morning. The forty-five miles through the tilled valleys and fair fields of Anatolia is a three hours' journey by train. When we arrived we took a carriage and drove to the heap of stones that mark the site of the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians. A nesting stork watched us from the summit of an old tower. They lie in a depression of the ground, these ruins, and not one stone remains upon another; in their glistening and fragmentary whiteness they

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represent the utmost degradation of a wreck. It is about a mile further on towards the sea that you find the vast and unbared remnants of the stadium, the library, the gymnasium, the courts of Ephesus. Sacked over and over again, these buildings were at last abandoned to the corroding desolation of the wilderness. Thence, once more, came man to snatch a victory from the earth. His labour is done and the bleached skeleton, like the ribs of some age-old, ice-bound monster, rests all-solitary in the waste. The very stone seems dead. You look at these broken colonnades and paved walks, at these steps and arches, and you feel as if the past had taken a stride nearer. Ah, but a silent stride. For where are all the voices which "for about the space of two hours cried out, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'"?

We were joined at our luncheon amidst the ruins by a Greek shepherd who spoke mournfully of the future and went his listless and unconsoled way ere we had finished. The afternoon began to wear through and the Austrian exhausted himself in an eloquent and incomprehensible survey of historic archæology. But we soon, I fear, ceased to pay any attention to him, while my friend, opening his guidebook, took up the wondrous tale in the words of the prosaic but accurate Bædeker. Although facts of all kinds are dear to me and vague generalities are the mere excuses of incompetence, yet I must confess that, on the site of ruins, I am almost unaffected by their history. Let me study such facts at home, where they do not hinder but help the imagination, but here, as I sit amongst the stones, association will give me the effortless pleasure of a dream. And that is all I want as a first impression. Does this imply that my afternoon was not quite so agreeable as it might have been? Well, suppose it does—it's only a matter of shades. Why should I complain? Time sped very happily and evening found us still on the mound of the dead city.

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I cannot say that I thought Smyrna itself exhilarating. It is altogether too nondescript. If you would study the Turkish character, that mixture of stubbornness, patience, craft, cruelty, and straightforwardness, you must go elsewhere. Here you will find only the residuum of East and West. A wind blew fiercely along the shore and made walking uncomfortable. Why this town attracts tourists I don't understand, though a local Spaniard assured me that it was the finest place in the whole world. I have an idea, however, that he was referring to female society, as he had the sleek appearance, with soft hands and a clipped, black moustache, which suggests that kind of connoisseur. Moreover, he always spoke to me behind his palm as though he were just going to say something disgraceful. So in spite of his remarks I remained, and remain, unconvinced. I was delighted to leave.

After a night's short sail from Smyrna my friend and I landed at the Piræus. What is there to write about this busy and repulsive port, this conglomeration of nationalities and nastiness? I believe it inspires everyone with the overwhelming desire to get out of it as quickly as possible. Romantic as the port of Athens, it is in itself hideously unromantic. Its trade may be the life-blood of Greece, but its personality is a blot upon that land of glory. We arrived, I remember, upon a cloudless morning, but we felt the gloom of winter on us until our cabman had trotted us out into the Attic plain. Then, once more, the sun flashed in our hearts. Only four miles separate Athens from the Piræus, four miles of flat and famous land, and ere you turn inshore from the sea the city is already before your eyes.

Athens! Must I write of another fiasco, must I tell you that the first glimpse of Athens is painfully disenchanting? Ah, but it is the truth. This brown city, set in a poor country at the foot of hills, looks basely unattractive in the distance. Even

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the Acropolis, whose Temples are visible afar, has an air of theatrical unreality. Not till you reach the centre of the town and have seen around you the ruins of the Golden Age can you believe that this is Athens herself. And even so the word has lost its innermost significance. That frame of mind which is the reflection of the Attic glow withers in this parched and unwatered land. The clean dignity of these broad streets tells, truly, of a new life and the revival of a nation, but it must have been finer to visit Athens ninety years since, when the crumbling ruins towered above a scattered village of 7,000 people, than it is to-day, when they stand, cared for but incongruous, amidst a city of 200,000. Like the baths of Caracalla, they have lost much in the re-discovery.

I will leave the Parthenon and all the crowned Acropolis to common knowledge and the Hellenistic spirit. That ageless perfection does not call for any praise of mine. Rounded and calm, there shines from it the sort of iridescence of a lovely and dissolving shell. In that faultlessness there is something almost annoying, something too impersonal for our era, something verging on intellectual decadence. No weariness is there but only a sense of that victory which is the end of effort. It is as though the noonday were to last for ever and there were to be no sunset, no night, and no to-morrow. An air of arrogant quiet, of conscious finality, broods over the Acropolis. And it is not the physical finality one feels before the Pyramids, but the finality of the mind, the finality of a triumph which, in its accomplishment, has robbed life of any further purpose. Such moods are the prelude to collapse, and must be till the close of time, and yet it is in such moods that the brain experiences its most exquisite and cultured pleasure. But how eagerly one turns from this splendour to the more mysterious twilight of suffering and struggle. Life does not rest. . . .

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We had a guide, a soldier on furlough, who took nothing for granted. I found it strangely soothing (though I suppose it ought to have been humiliating) to be considered ignorant of A B C. I listened delightedly as he held forth on the three varieties of the column and the three ages of Greek art. The oily and satisfying sentences flowed from him in a torrent, as, in a voice totally unlike that in which he discussed his savings, he gave rein to his store of guide-book erudition. Some people would have been irritated, but, quite frankly, I was not. He was a study in himself. I don't think he was a very typical Greek—he was too detached and unexcitable for that—but he certainly had their usual traits of caution in money matters and of self-esteem. And he was a genuine patriot. Indeed, all modern Greeks are patriotic, though their patriotism has an operatic tinge and is frightfully bound up with politics. They spend their leisure making futile cabals in rather dirty cafés. Dressed in neat black clothes or in immaculate uniforms, you see them bending round the tables, sipping coffee and whispering. I must say it appears very unreal. The Greeks are as democratic a people as there are in Europe, quite as democratic as the Swiss or the Norwegians, and yet subterranean intrigue is the very breath of their life. (I speak of the inhabitants of Athens.) Everyone is a politician, a lover of freedom, and a great theorist—every man, that is to say, for I imagine that the women are not much concerned with such things. They are probably more concerned with their white complexions and lustrous eyes. (Maid of Athens, you must have stolen many a heart—but did you ever give one back?) Both Byron and Shelley wrote poetry about Greece whose romantic feeling for the past is tinged with disillusionment as to the present—*The Isles of Greece* and *Hellas*, for instance—but when we get to Byron's letters the cloak is thrown off altogether and the

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serenity of the Greek ideal has given place to petty squabbles. Byron understood the modern Greeks with some accuracy and must have made as many startling discoveries in his own line as Schliemann did in his. And they need understanding, with their mass of contradictions. An exalted conception and a rather sordid conduct are locked in a perpetual embrace. Proud of their past, which is very doubtfully their past at all, they have founded on it a grand scheme of unity and aspiration, which they spend most of their energy trying to upset. But who can disentangle the web of national character?—and one of these days all hopes may be justified and Greece may really live again.

With my guide I drove one afternoon to Eleusis, a matter of nearly thirty miles there and back, through the wooded gorge that passes from the plain of Athens on to the sea-coast road fronting the Straits of Salamis. A noble drive, and one enlivened by the ready communicativeness of my soldier. But whether he spoke for my edification or out of the fullness of his heart, who am I to decide? We explored Eleusis with activity but, truly, there is little to see save hopeless ruin. The Mysteries did not save their Temple from destruction.

The best view of Athens is to be obtained from the top of Mount Lykabettos, that huge cone of rock surmounted by the Greek Church of St. George. Flat beneath it and twining round the hill like a sickled moon spreads the city, while just opposite rises the Acropolis. Athens crouches beneath the two hills and, as though squashed in their grip, bulges out into the country on either hand. This is the Attic plain, bounded by Mount Hymettos to the east and by Mount Parnes to the north. Over the ridge of the Acropolis, dwarfed in their perspective, cluster the houses of the Piræus, with the narrow sea of the Greek Islands beyond. No other view of Athens could rival this.

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The centre of the town is disfigured by an atrocious Royal Palace. In this city of graceful buildings, where modern taste and the wealth of currant merchants and bankers have harmonized the contour of the streets, its unadorned white squareness is a monstrosity. It has the kind of large and solid dreariness which might have appealed to George III., and most unfortunate it is that all Athenian roads lead thither and that from first to last it must inevitably fix you with its vacant stare; but perhaps the democratic Greeks obtain an ironic satisfaction from this constant reminder of Royal greatness. Let us hope that one of these days they will take it into their heads to pull it down. The Royal gardens might then be enlarged into a small park and the capital assume, at length, a more worthy dignity.

The air of Athens in April is fresh and halcyon. The bees are beginning to wake on the further banks of Hymettos, whose bleak and uninviting outline belies the too romantic association of its name, and a pellucid light distils itself over the reddish earth. At early morning and at sunset there is a certain charm to be got from walking across the campagna. That is when you feel the real personality of Greece, land of clear distance and mild breezes, and lose for ever from your heart the ideal Greece of legend. Already in spring a dry dustiness has settled upon the boulevards and the budding trees. We must wait for the new water supply before this unfertile ground will become a garden. Let me add but one more distressing touch: the honey of Hymettos is no choicer than other honey, the wines of Greece are resinous and to be avoided, and the native cookery (fate of the South!) tends towards an over-love of garlic. By their fruits . . .

Westwards from the capital a railway traverses a stony and dried-up country to Patras, the port for Brindisi. The high crossing of the Corinth Canal alone breaks the monotony of the eight hours' run. Of course, one ought to break it for oneself by a visit to

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Corinth (which my indefatigable friend did), but once I start on a journey I am in a fret till it is finished. Illogical, no doubt. I began by looking out of the train with all the anticipation necessary, but fervour soon abandoned me. For it is a lugubrious picture. A sparse population of wild shepherds inhabits this barren stretch to tend the goats that feed upon the scrub of the mountains. No one but a blind enthusiast, one of these people to whom every inch of Greece is sacred, would wish to linger in such a spot.

Of Patras I saw next to nothing. It was already dark when I arrived and the lights of my steamer were gleaming in the harbour. But I don't think I missed very much and I really hope never to see it by daylight. That trudge from the station through the pouring rain, carrying a heavy bag and tripping on the pavement, has taken away all my curiosity. I made for an inn, had a very second-rate dinner, and was then rowed out to the steamer and went to bed to the noise of the increasing storm. Thus did my final view of Greece put the seal upon my disappointment. I have, I fear, those insular romantic prejudices which, while leading me to wander, leave me eternally dissatisfied. At least, I presume that's the explanation. We northerners do not in the least resemble ancient Greeks, and though critically we can perceive the genius of their work, yet æsthetically we cannot perceive the beauty of that land which meant so much to them. If this be denied, then let me speak for myself.

Next morning I was in Corfu. The old Venetian fortress guards the entrance to the roadstead and an enduring mass of green verdure spreads everywhere over the visible terrain. Far off, the steep and desolate mountains of Albania stand blue against the sky and, indeed, Corfu, itself, is an island of hills, though the richness of its soil mitigates the austerity of its appearance. After traversing the thirsty land of Greece, this westernmost of the Grecian Isles opens

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to one like a cooling draught. Corfu is still what it was when Homer sang its praises.

No sooner had we anchored than a gentleman from the shore, plausible but inarticulate, urgently offered us his services as guide. (My friend had now rejoined me.) He explained that he wanted to take us a short drive for an exorbitant price—or, rather, that's what his explanation amounted to. We listened sympathetically to this siren and when we had made an obvious reduction consented to go with him. He led us to his carriage and we drove off. We soon passed beyond the outposts of the town and entered upon a country that in wealth of vegetation could rival the finest of the English shires at midsummer. This peninsula of Corfu—you must scale the Castle grounds to grasp the shape of the land—is a paradise of fertility, the fertility of flower-gardens and of meadows knee-deep in grass. The road winds uphill by the entrance to the Royal villa and by yellow orchards that slope towards the water. After a few miles you come out high on the hillside above an arm of the Mediterranean. The carriage stops and, going forward on foot, you look downwards on a bay and across it to the range of the Corfu mountains losing itself in dying falls upon the distant sea. It is certainly one of the loveliest landscapes in the world. Two little islands lie beneath you, reflecting themselves in that intense and unruffled mirror. On one is a minute Greek monastery, on the other a farm. Sheltered within the trees upon the further shore rises the Achileion, that Palace of tragic memories, whose whiteness is but a dot upon the wide surging of the wood. No vision of Turner's, no dream of the Golden Bow or of Dido, could rival the harmonious serenity of this picture.

Unfortunately our guide would permit of no long stay. He had sworn to get us back by such and such an hour and he had a strictly prosaic sense of responsibility. The gorgeous scene affected him solely from

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a cash point of view: it was choice because it attracted people who liked carriages. He had no poetic instincts. In fact, he was decorously shocked at the suggestion. "*Moi?—Poête?—Non!*" As he continued to urge departure we yielded reluctantly and, re-entering the carriage, drove back to the port. But as I did not leave off expatiating on the beauty of his island to him he was at last fain to assure me, in a tearful voice, that it was truly a place extremely good for one's health. Such was his most powerful flight of commendation. But yet, when I think of it, he came pretty near the mark. For, apart from everything else, it must be "extremely good for one's health" to live upon that hillside, overlooking that bay and the mountains beyond.

The following morn found us in Brindisi, and I will own that I was not sorry to return to Western Europe and felt no grief in quitting the Near East. Classical associations, as such, leave me unmoved and the Outer Hebrides appear to me more thrilling than the Isles of Greece. Famous names are the snares of the learnèd. Moreover, romance to be romance must allow something for your own discovery, but from Egypt to Greece there is a pilgrimage in every yard, and that pilgrimage becomes, at length, a penance. Give me the New World or an India, seething and chaotic! But the glamour of romance may shine forth anywhere. To part from some places, to recall them in after years, fills one with the sort of passionate regret one has in thinking of the women one has loved. And more beautiful places, like more beautiful women, may disappear in smoke for all you care. Often they go hand in hand and in the foreground of some remembered spot stands the figure of a girl. I close my eyes and there, before me, I see their faces. We were together once and we shall be together no more. But the world is wide, the heart is strong, and the joys of meeting are worth, surely, all the sadness of farewell.

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LONDON SIDELIGHTS

NO Parisian could be more loyal to Paris than is your true Londoner to London, and no city soever can have brought forth from its dumb millions more fervent and original voices in its praise than those of a Johnson, a Dickens, or a Chesterton. Indeed, I have noticed that even in the remote places of the earth the exile looks forward to his final retirement thither as to some incredible piece of good fortune. I must admit that I don't share this sentiment—being a Scot and no true Londoner—and though I have spent, off and on, half my life in the capital yet, were it not for relations and friends, I could face with equanimity the idea of never seeing it again. At least, I think I could, but maybe I should do as all the rest and come fluttering back in time like an infatuated moth. The fascination of London, apart from unanalysable sentiment, derives in the thought that here you are at the core, that here you are complete; but, over and above, there is something very attractive in the notion of a place where you are both lost and found. London is the great purveyor of solitude and company, and nowadays the glare must, so to speak, be succeeded by the grave to make existence tolerable. The incuriosity and freedom of London are unique. I have spent years in flats and scarcely seen my next-door neighbours, and I am sure they were no more interested in me than I was in them. That, I consider, nice and just as it should be. You shut your door and you are in your castle, and there's the end of it. Yet, somehow, I can never regard London as a home, though it has a solid quality about it that keeps one from being uncomfortable. Its

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very size is protective and the thought that no one has ever explored it all, not even a cabman, endows it with a romantic significance. I don't pretend to know London, but I can find my way about it and that is sufficient for me. I like to cut from point to point through unaccustomed streets, I like to have the feeling of the amazed visitor. In fact, I am an amateur Londoner and I shall never be anything else.

What a personality it has, this immense city, and how one feels it anew each time the train bears one from the country through those miles of monotonous, melancholy streets! But upon this basis, so sure and hoary that the mere thought of London ten thousand miles away will cause you to sense it like a definite presence, there is implanted every nuance and change of the changing year. Who could believe that out of the exhaustion of its late summer, out of the slush of its winter streets, would arise this miracle of the London spring? Ah, there our city has no rival! Spring breaks upon London in a day with one shiver of delight. A restless, faint discontent stirs in the heart, an aching pain that desires goodness and desires life. Strolling about London at this season I have found an added mystery in her women as though each girl held out to you the promise of an adventure that her eyes would whisper and her lips deny. The enticing hours make youth in love with love, but as spring succeeds to spring and that Fata Morgana, the ideal passion, evades you yet, you will find it much more sensible to be in love with an ordinary woman. Extreme youth is satisfied with the abstract, and I remember that when I was twenty I have sought happiness by bicycling out from Notting Hill Gate (that home of decayed gentlewomen and doubtful foreigners) to read poetry under the trees at Hampton Court: my tastes are now more human. Yes, youth is full of illusions, which are, perhaps, no more illusionary, after all, than the more concrete desires of a

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maturer age. For is not the intoxication of the spring felt by each one of us alike? The very movement of the streets seems gayer and the perfume of the flower-beds in Hyde Park is borne, metaphorically, into the turmoil of the City. One wants to be up and wandering and, in the new aspect of all around, to taste one's happiness, to know that the sap is mounting and that the spring has arrived. It takes me back, this feeling, to a memory of many years ago, to the time when I used to meet every morning upon London Bridge, amidst the throng of hurrying business men, the superbest creature it has been my fate to see. She was very tall, with a figure like Diana armed, and her masses of brown hair surmounted a face of serene and startling beauty. We never spoke but each day's lingering glance lit up for me the hours of bondage and filled me with a breath of hope. Then, lo, she was gone one day and I saw her not again. Where are you now, I wonder, my Diana, my Dona Lisa of the smile? For me, at least, the years pass over you unheeded. . . .

In the evening repose of the vast city the magic of its rejuvenation awakes more tenderly than ever. The stars come out like candles dipped in an immeasurable bowl of milk and the buoyant pulse of the night goes sweeping through the lengthened twilight. Oh, these London dusks of May when every street scene has a fantastic import and every shadow hides a secret! The author of *Limehouse Nights* must travel westward! Leaning from my window I see the river flowing with argent patches and the outline of the Battersea trees blotting out the enormous squalor and vitality of south London. The soft murmur of the night suspires to heaven in a teeming sigh, the sigh of eight million people, who, in this instant of youth renewed, have turned from despair to hope. A poetic fancy, but an inaccurate one, as I have just learned from the tones of two women that are being wafted to

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me down the street in a torrent of personalities. But, seriously, how do you expect a woman with six children, one pound a week (sometimes), and a debauched husband ever to feel gladness? Bah! The morning of the year must speak to her with an even more bitter mockery than to the caged animals over there to the north. No wonder the poor are caustic!

Animals, alas, have not that refuge. In the Zoological Gardens, which, of all the places enlivened by the touch of spring, respond most eagerly to her advances, the mild air but rouses in the inhabitants the spirit of their lost freedom. The flowers are blossoming, the sea-birds are nesting in their enclosure, and the mammals, yawning from their winter apathy, prowl to and fro behind the bars. The tragic unrest of these dwellers of the wilderness, tinged with its unconscious memories and longings, is pitiful and I am not sure that captive animals should be any more the subject of gaping observation than are afflicted human beings. The argument follows, of course, Why should there be any such animals at all? There wouldn't be, I presume, if we didn't have a kind of innate, sensible perspective about such things. Each year I seem to grow fonder of these Gardens. The small-cat house and the aviary of the birds-of-paradise have a special attraction for me, as do the deer-sheds where little mice rustle amongst the straw, but I can sit in any secluded corner and, with that crisp air in my nostrils, lose myself in reveries of enchanted lands. The early hours are the best for a visit, as the Gardens are deserted then and the day is unsullied. But neither time nor season can keep me from them. . . . Apart from the Zoo, however, we have our own wild life in London, not alone the life of sparrows, of Thames-haunting gulls, and of wood-pigeons in the Parks ("Wouldn't they be tasty in a pie?" as a relative of mine once exclaimed after gazing earnestly at several

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pecking about the grass near our feet), but of many a rarer fellow-townsman, whose unsuspected variety tends, strange to say, rather to an increase than to a diminution. It is a consoling reflection.

I have been enabled to spend so many mornings at the Zoo because, for years, it was my habit to make an annual stay with some friends who lived just without the gates. Theirs is an old-fashioned house, already doomed, and it is situated in one of those backwaters north of Regent's Park which the tide of traffic and improvement has forgotten. The head of the house, my dear old friend, died recently in his ninetieth year. To the end he retained his memory undimmed and all the courtesy of his prime, and, sitting daily in his book-lined study, whose one window gave on to a backyard in the most appalling state of disorder and neglect, he used to talk placidly to me of famous controversies and household names. The only inhabitants of this backyard (now that the rabbit is dead) are marauding cats, and even the granddaughter finds it hard to maintain her spirits amidst its sordid debris. But I confess it has a sort of attraction for me. In that dingy house, overlooking that dingy yard, surrounded by dusty books, Japanese prints, pre-Raphaelite pictures, and untroubled by any outer noise, I feel an escape. Would you credit it?—I have passed whole days there lying on a sofa—the sofa on which Shelley spent his last night—reading, sleeping, and staring out of the window. Such an existence may be morally indefensible, but the spell of it was complete; and really I do believe that it is only the energetic who know the value of bouts of laziness. There is nothing like lying on a sofa in the right frame of mind! The chief thing is not to pretend that you are doing it from an hygienic motive. It is perfectly certain you aren't, and you will merely spoil your pleasure without gaining any advantage. No, the surrender must be quite unabashed and then, in

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this utter suspension of the faculties, you will find such a tonic as the ancients found in their periodic orgies.

These lethargic days have evolved, in their sequence, with the normal activity of my London life. They were merely a symptom of our time, leading to mental effort and a desire for exercise. It is in such reactions that I have ever and again experienced a craving, sporadic and short-lived, to explore London from end to end, to tear, as it were, the cloak from off its body. Then do I indulge in long walks that carry me I scarce know whither. Especially do I embrace the gas-lit streets of the Surrey side on a Saturday night, when the monotonous "Buy, Buy, Buy, Buy," comes from the flaring butchers' shops and all the good-nature, chaos, suffering, and irony of the London poor jostle at your elbow; or, conversely, the empty desert of north London on a summer morn, when your steps echo in the void of wide, forking streets that cross and mingle like a maze, and where sleeping clerkdom lies about you in its unnumbered thousands. This, to me, is the real London, this London of the half-way radii, far more than is the amorphous sameness of the outer suburbs or the blasé variety of the centre. (Yet, perhaps, Liverpool Street Station at six-thirty in the evening is the most extraordinary sight in the world, and Bond Street of an afternoon the most sumptuous.) The night-life that revolves round Piccadilly Circus, that life of theatres and hinted impropriety, has, after all, its own very dull conventions and soon bores one. How often have I smiled over the sight of the last trains outward bound carrying the timid young men from Putney who had come in for a "night out" and had never had the pluck to do anything but tilt their hats on one side and throw killing glances to right and left!

With this curiosity to discover London there went, at one time, an ambition to sample every restaurant

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that had any special reputation of its own, but I am now quite content to dine at a few favourites. Where can you (or could you) get such saddle of mutton as at Simpson's, such entrecôte Bordelaise as at the Café Royal, such hors d'œuvres as at Chantecler? In the same way I had once a desire to try every Turkish Bath in London, but I now ring the changes on Northumberland Avenue and Jermyn Street. In days of muggy gloom, when you are tired, depressed, or lonely, a Turkish Bath is the one antidote that never fails. With a few shillings, an evening paper, and a copy of a certain sixpenny weekly, whose informative and worldly view of affairs is precisely what you want on such an occasion, you can drive away all worry within those steaming walls. For sheer physical enjoyment of the blander sort I know of nothing to equal that moment in which, arrayed elegantly in a towel, you enter the first hot room and, fitting the sandals to your feet, sink into an armchair. It is alpha and omega.

In Turkish Baths, by the way, you will frequently meet men who cannot be "placed" as readily as the average Londoner, not, I mean, as to occupation, but as to residence. I spoke before of the personality of London, but, of course, each district has its own sub-personality which impinges upon and sinks into the giant personality of the parent-city. Thus, most Londoners are citizens not alone of London but of Chelsea, or St. John's Wood, or Mayfair, or Kensington, or Bloomsbury, or fifty other places, and you can't mistake the signs either. But here, I say, are men who are not, apparently, citizens of any particular district. No, these well-fed men, with their heavy moustaches and their air as of stalled oxen, belong to what you might call the sporting or music-hall world and, as such, claim no domicile. You will find a crowd of them any Saturday afternoon in the billiard-saloon under the arches of Charing Cross Station.

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Bookies, publicans, boxers, comedians, dog-fanciers, football experts, and commercial travellers compose this crowd, which, in spite of its being conservative, prosperous, and non-moral, is powerful with the very men whose parliamentary representatives are, or used to be, given over to teetotalism and Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. The newspaper convention that all intellectuals are Radicals and all Socialists puritans helps to create abroad that general impression of English hypocrisy. When I was a youth I thought the same myself. I shall never forget how, on the first occasion I dined at a Liberal stronghold, I felt it disgraceful to eat at all. Opposite me sat a man of austere and transcendental mien who, I knew in my heart of hearts, cared nothing but for the things of the soul. Suddenly he called out, "Waiter, what's the pudding?" "College pudding, sir." "College pudding!—lead me to it!" shouted the venerable fraud. I, too, shouted—but not aloud—and then and there I was released from my bonds. Yes, the whole convention is a piece of silliness, but as Conservatives do secretly believe that stupidity and soundness have something to do with one another, and as the average working-man never gets the chance of being heard, it dies hard. On the other hand, the fact that there has developed in England so much distrust of politicians during the last dozen years may mean that it *is* dying. I hope so. . . . Well, I appear to have drifted unwittingly on to dangerous ground. I only wanted to show how here, in the heart of the town, there flourishes one of those myriad London "worlds" of which the average inhabitant knows so little—about as little as he knows of London's drainage system or London's markets. It is a world that has to be reckoned with, but it is quite inarticulate outside of sporting journals and trade papers more astonishingly bizarre than are the theses written for degrees by American students. It was my fortune once to hold social intercourse with

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a London undertaker, and I can now inform you that there are even several papers devoted to this branch of industry. You never saw a man more absolutely the part. Of indescribable decorum and with the eyes of a bereaved frog, his voice, pitched habitually to a death-chamber key, seemed always about to pronounce words of unobtrusive sympathy. His delicacy of feeling was touching. On asking him what they wrote about in his trade papers, he observed laconically, "Oh, fittings and so forth." Whoever heard of such an idea—fittings! He was a pearl of great price.

"Come, Mr. ——," I said, "you're an undertaker; won't you tell me precisely what you do when you're —called in?"

He gazed at me with professional gravity as he replied in that subdued voice of his, "It's like this: suppose a gentleman should—er—happen to pass away——"

I had long been anxious to know how exactly it was an undertaker managed to strike the proper note between business and sorrow. Now I understood. The correct thing, evidently, was to treat death as an accident much to be regretted but very respectable. It was a wonderful beginning.

"All right, Mr. ——, he passes away; now what do you do?"

He was not loth to give details, some of which were distasteful. "But personally," he continued, "I always show the highest respect." After a pause he fell off into reminiscence. "Spirit-drinkers make beautiful corpses," he murmured, "beer-drinkers—er—very unpleasant. There are times in the hot weather when we have to——"

"Quite so," I broke in hurriedly; "now would you mind telling me something about funerals?"

He did not mind; indeed, he became positively enthusiastic on the subject of family-vaults,

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plush "fittings," and a £37 10s. funeral that was his own most soaring achievement. "I recommend it very strongly," he added.

"Even for a client without a family-vault?" I ventured to ask. It didn't sound quite "the thing."

"Even for anyone who can—er—afford it," he answered severely.

I know that those who read me so far will think that I am romancing in rather doubtful taste, but I'm not. Our conversations used to take place in a guard-room and the tendency of them was the cause of much unfavourable comment. Nevertheless, I persevered until I lost interest in him all at once because, in the midst of our exquisite fiction of politeness, reverently lowered voices, and "Mistering" of one another, he suddenly forgot himself so far as to produce a collection of indecent picture-postcards. The spell was broken and the enravishing humbug—we were both humbugs, I suppose—had himself outraged the conventions which, in one's commerce with the world, hold society together. Think what I missed!—another week and I should have known everything!

Mention of this individual reminds me of one more odd London specimen whose presence has haunted my footsteps for years. I have not spoken to him and have no idea who he is, but in all sorts of places he is liable to appear before me, walking with a solemn, vacant look, dressed in an old frock-coat and silk hat, and followed by a dog as abject and enigmatical as himself. It was in the Tivoli that I saw him first, leaning against one of the pillars and joining in a chorus with an expressionless face, but now it is generally when I am on the top of a bus that he looms into view. There he goes, plodding along with his dog, a typical bar-loafer, one would hazard, to whom his father has left, say, £200 a year and who spends his time prowling about London between drinks. And yet he may be a most respectable churchwarden. How is one to tell?

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London contains every type and every profession and that's what makes it so absorbing. All the same, it is the easiest of towns in which to grow, if not narrow, at least preoccupied with a single aspect or set of ideas. This is the paradox of London that, as you are always able to find here people of similar tastes to your own, so are you apt to drift into cliques and groups whose interest is restricted to those who either agree or violently disagree with them. And this is quite apart from the fact that all intellectual circles contain a large percentage of very inferior and unreal persons —just as eight books out of ten are written by people much stupider, only much vainer, than those who never dream of writing at all—and that the more you mix in them the worse will it be for you. The ordinary man is right in distrusting the artistic temperament. My experience of these self-conscious London assemblies is, however, that you will meet there, as a rule, someone to compensate you for your disgust, someone who is not the mere flunkey of ideas, someone who doesn't feel morally superior solely from being in a minority, someone, in brief, who is really remarkable. . . . The cure for this isolation of the spirit, this intellectual arrogance, is to be found in the streets themselves. London is the one adequate microcosm of life. Every murderous and compassionate instinct, every vile, exalted, or wayward thought brushes against you as you go by and leaves upon you, at last, that whirling sensation which is mankind's usual impression of this city. I feel it now as I write. Idle musings and sentimental excursions do not compose my London routine, no, not in the least, but fronted by a subject so big and a space so little I must select my days and moods. Half my life goes into these few pages, half of that private life which, in each one of us, is an autobiography infinitely fuller and more intimate than those of Pepys, Rousseau, and Casanova put together. I am like Mr. Verloc issuing from his home in Soho

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to admire the ordered routine of the London pageant, and, again, I am like Mr. Verloc in so much as, even as I sit at this table, I am as one who has "wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed" gloating over the memories of a life of rich variety. In very necessity, therefore, I must pick and choose, veering from the main currents into the twinkling side-tracks of my fancy. It is legitimate enough.

Londoners, on the whole, are a cheerful and kindly set of people and the real Cockney notoriously so. I fear he is dying out. The East End is now a sort of reserve of Russian Jews (an overstatement, of course), and the class of Englishman who used to be born within sound of Bow Bells is now born in some waste and villa'd suburb of the far south or the north-east. Possibly it is all for the best, though it is sad to contemplate the eventual extinction of that hideous but friendly accent. There is a good deal of humour and tolerance in the Londoner's unending interest in the life of his streets, but underlying his shrewdness there is an irritating self-complacency. The very thought of being a Londoner seems to flatter him into a kind of smug satisfaction. All the same he is likeable and deservedly so. To visit his sights and landmarks is, for the citizen of London, a duty that has to be got over some time or other, but to watch a cab accident or to stare into a shop-window is a joy for ever. I sympathize with that attitude. I can never see a crowd without wanting to find out what it's all about, and, as for shop-windows, I could spend the whole day studying those of jewellers', grocers', second-hand booksellers', and expensive fruiterers'. They are like so many fairy tales.

Talking of shops, I remember going into Selfridge's one sultry morning with a friend to drink an ice-cream soda, and how shocked we were at the vision of a stout, elderly woman all by herself in a corner devouring dainties. It looked exactly as if she had stolen away

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from her family to satisfy an unacknowledged craving. It is little things such as that about women that make men feel uncomfortable. The truth is that, in spite of all modern absolutions, we permit in men what we do not permit in women and we permit in women what we do not permit in men. Personally I think it right, not because it is logical—it isn't logical—but because it is an instinct. The world is not founded upon logic and many deep emotions, the emotions of patriotism and faith for instance, are not very reasonable. Simplicity is hardly the most noticeable point about life and the things that seem proven merely to mention them, such things as rationalism, feminism, the equality of mankind, and the stupidity of national instinct, immediately rouse my suspicion. The zeal of reformers too often ends in their riding a see-saw and while they are weighing down the abundant absurdities of the past up jump another set of errors. Like Monsieur Bergeret, I am not, perhaps, religious but I am a theologian (a poor one) and I deplore the supercession of the doctrine of Original Sin, with its individualistic conception of salvation, for that of the Perfectibility of Man, which is not merely a logical fallacy in itself but is at the root of most of the logical fallacies of to-day. . . . All this from watching a lady at her harmless enjoyment!

It is instinct, after all, that keeps one sane amidst the welter of academic ideas, and though instinct is frequently put forward as an excuse for loose thinking, yet there is one instinct that is never wrong—that no life is complete without the friendship of both men and women. London, which has brought me so much, has, above all, brought me friends. I would lose them of neither sex, for while one flies to the restful companionship of men from the perilous friendship of women, one returns to women as to an adventure worth all the safety that ever made life calm and barren. Yes, one couldn't do without female

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society. Give me a day upon the river with a pretty girl, a shaded tea under the willows, and happy laughter beside the whispering Thames! The old father of great London shows not a wrinkle on a summer's eve and his nights are still as fresh as in the dawn of history. The view of the darkened, spangled Thames, like the view from Highgate or Richmond Hill, touches a common chord and Whistler, himself, never found it more romantic, more spellbound in its glow, than does the meekest of love-sick clerks. And walk along the Embankment when the winter sun is setting cold and angry over the water. The mud upon the southern shore glitters with a nacreous reflection and the four chimneys of the electric power-house beyond Battersea Bridge stand menacingly against the pale and washed-out sky. In the glimmer of the dying rays the Thames has assumed the opalescent tinge of that oxidized glass found in ancient tombs and the whole landscape seems to shrink upon itself with forlorn resignation.

It was on just such an evening as this that I fell in with an old, wandering tramp, an Autolycus of the twentieth century, who in a few moments of roguish and jovial talk opened to me yet another dimension of the streets, another of London's underworlds, and who presently went on his way, chortling, with my coin. Chelsea Embankment has never been quite the same to me since.

I must stop, or I will begin to fancy that I feel for London other than I do, I will begin to forget how many are the streets I detest, how many the hours I wish to bury, and, chiefly, I will begin to overlook the dowdiness of London which, in the long run, eats into your soul as dust eats into a rug. My valediction must be the sum total of my opinion, not the flattery of chosen moments. I repeat, I am not a Londoner, and the local patriotism of Londoners is incomprehensible to me. London rouses my curiosity, not

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my devotion, and, sauntering along its streets, I feel like a connoisseur leaning over an intaglio and muttering slowly to himself, "Very—fine." In truth, if I may use the expression, I do actually collect London rather than live in it. Does it sound impertinent? It is not, primarily, the historico-typographical aspect that I collect, that aspect which, from the days of Stowe and his *Survey* to those of Wheatley, Besant, Harben, and Bell, has occupied the attention of so many, but the stray corners, the moods, the vast travail of the streets. Well, collections are, at once, risky and captivating things, risky because they often pall or degenerate into a mania, captivating because they open to you the secret of youth in the glee of new discoveries. There I am content to let it rest.

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XI

WEST INDIAN CRUISES

THROUGH the chance and change of things it comes about that in equatorial Africa I am sitting down to recall old voyages amongst the West Indies. The idea is, perhaps, not so incongruous, for here, amidst the dry bush-veld, far removed from any sea, the thought of the encircled, spicy isles weighs sweetly upon the imagination. The charm of memory lies in the idyllic aspect of all yesterdays and I am now just in the mood to let the past trickle by me like some rare and irrecoverable essence. Again I view the sunsets of the Caribbean sea, I feel the breath of her nights, I watch her pale and fragile dawns break, as with a sudden hush, upon her reefs and coral bays. Cruising about these islands is like stealing a march on time. You stand motionless, as it were, in a ring of changeless hours, not dead hours as in the open sea but still and trance-like hours, in which the phantom outlines gleam and fade upon the far horizon. The true aroma of such days can never be expressed, those days of the senses working acutely, harmoniously, and as under some guiding spell. Individual experience is all that counts, and my one wish is to relate facts and let them embody, if possible, their own atmosphere.

Not being a philosopher, I am of those who ask too much of life, and beauty, music, love, and memory sadden me with their promise of the unfulfilled. Most of us, I believe, are like that and presumably others before me have wondered whether it be not a kind of natural antidote against that boredom of which childhood and youth know so little. I am led to these reflections by thinking of my two visits to Barbados.

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The first was made when I was under twenty, the second when I was nearing thirty, and between them I seem to have passed through every stage from enchantment to disillusionment. The Barbados of my salad days rises before me as a garden of loveliness, the Barbados of my maturity as a weary spot dumped down upon the hem of the true West Indies. It is rather curious that when I envisage this group my mind pivots upon the islands I care for least and most—upon Barbados and Jamaica. I suppose it is a question of intimacy. A thousand miles apart they stand, guarding the eastern and the western gates, and betwixt them the flowing sea washes upon many a shore and ledge of rock. I love Jamaica, I detest Barbados, but through that detestation there flits the memory of an early devotion that nothing can stale. That morning I first landed at Bridgetown and felt the pulse of the Tropics awake mysteriously in my young blood! The heave of the ship was in my limbs as I stepped ashore, and in that sunlight, all shot with bright colours and dark faces, I seemed physically and mentally to reel. Details are hazy now, alas, but unconnected sensations spring peak-like out of the mist—the sweet, sticky smell of the crushed coral streets, the taste of the lime-squashes in the Ice House, the sight of a humming-bird darting over the tombs, the envy I felt for a white employé at the Post Office, a man who had actually Barbados for a home! We drove out to the Marine Hotel, an unadorned and shadeless building that faces the sea across a ragged field. I have stayed there since, I have known the bitter ennui of Barbados within those walls, but on that first afternoon it seemed to me like a second heaven. The strangeness and the newness of it all, the sense of peace, the sense of rest, made beautifully complete the secret desires of my heart. I wanted nothing more and was certain that this island would give me nothing less. We had arranged to tarry the night, and in the fall of the

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afternoon I heard, for the first time, the clamorous outcry of the tropic dark. In that suggestion of insane vitality rousing in the dusk the South was revealed to me once and for all. It knocked upon my brain with its disordered insistence, raising majestic images, hinting at unopened regions. Words! My goodness, how they hamper me! I do not ask for the gift of language, I ask for the gift of reticence. But it is the highest and rarest of the poetic gifts, and no wonder that I ask in vain.

We had gone upstairs to get ready for dinner when an official rang us on the telephone to say that they had received new orders and that the ship was about to sail. We had to repack in all speed and hurry out to catch a late tram. The night was starry, full of the laden, soft gloom of the Tropics. The tempered breath of the bay came puff-like through the trees and the earth responded with its heavy odours. Forms showed up for an instant and cries resounded, as, through the blare of the island-night, we clattered townwards. The teeming sea rippled upon the teeming land and all the black escarpment of the isle was like a shadow thrown up from the water. And so coming to the shore we boarded our boat and pulled out into the bay. Behind us the twinkling town and the dying mutter of the wild, before us the riding-lights of anchored craft swaying above the silent water! Only the unsophisticated heart could feel emotionally the complex aureole of a night like that.

After all, we did not sail till morning and we had time for a bathe over the side before we set our westerly course for Jamaica. Thus it happened that we passed by daylight between St. Lucia and St. Vincent, rugged and verdurous islands, whose peaks, seen through a rain-mist, frowned at us beneath a threatening sky. Over St. Lucia's murky shoulder, deep in the further sea and clear-cut against a bank of twilight, Mont Pelè reared itself upon Martinique

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—Mont Pelè which but a few weeks since had burst asunder and brought death and disaster upon the island. . . . When day dawned we were out of sight of land, and through the sweltering heat of the mid-summer we held on our path beneath the northern curve of the Leeward archipelago. In this stretch of ocean, semi-landlocked by two continents and their island-fringe, the life of the sea stirs visibly upon its surface. The sargasso weed supports a multitude of animalculæ, the dolphin pursues the flying-fish from swell to swell, and enormous ray leap forth as though in deadly terror of some up-rushing monster. Day breaks swift and cool out of the hot darkness and sinks at length like another flood beyond the sea. The sun is king over these waters and in the deepest night keeps his memory awake in the short restlessness of stifling sleep. A hundred in the shade breeds life but not repose. . . .

And now let me return to Barbados after the lapse of the disenchanting years. I had come out from England in a crowded ship, three in my cabin, with the porthole shut, and a young German, lying supine from sickness, sucking oranges in there throughout the livelong day. Existence on board had but few attractions, for even when the weather moderated and winter collapsed it only meant a worse rush for your table, and truly I should have welcomed any land. I thought of Barbados! When the red beam of its light smote across the waves it called to me with an eloquence undimmed. We anchored in Carlisle Bay and in the morning I went on shore—the shore of my first landing. But the scales had fallen from my eyes. Bridgetown's flat and crowded streets lay huddled along its palm-strewn beach, loud advertisements plastered the shop windows, and the greed of commerce flourished there beneath the broiling sun. The northern and the southern boats took their passengers and sailed away, the big steamer, herself, left for

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Colombia, and of our whole shipload I remained an almost solitary exemplar upon the island. I made for the old Marine and there I stopped for some weeks, with one irruption to South America and many an abortive plan for departure. Particularly did I hunger for Trinidad, of whose bay of Port of Spain I keep yet one grand morning's picture. I wish I had done more than scheme, for Barbados, though healthy, is to my latter eyes no better than a lost Isle of Man. The tamest place in the Tropics, sloping gradually up to low hills and insignificant in all its breadth, it supports a dense population of negroes upon a chain of sugar and sea-island cotton plantations. No doubt the planters are a prosperous community, full of local pride and speaking with the most distinctive of accents, but there are signs amongst these Europeans of interbreeding and of a southern climate prolonged through many generations. The last word in such defects—defects untinged by any kind of prosperity—is reached in the "Mean Whites" across the island, who, descendants, as they aver, of Cromwell's Ironsides, have now degenerated into almost inarticulate fishermen whose boast it is never to have intermingled with the blacks and whose misfortune it may well be also. The negro of Barbados is an inconsequential, gay fellow, reminding one rather of the cheeky little troupial which is its commonest bird, and owing to the comparative difficulty of life due to over-population, he is both a harder worker and a more inveterate beggar than his Jamaican brother. I was once persecuted for several days by an able-bodied individual whose only ascertainable right to charity rested in his name—John Brown. But perhaps he was a loyalist of the old school.

I took various walks and excursions about Barbados, none of them particularly gratifying and some of them decidedly boring. On the other hand, they have left pictures in my mind which, witnessed in solitude and recalled long after in crowded

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thoroughfares, are grateful to me. I remember driving out to a lonely inn perched above the sea and fronting a coral-rimmed lagoon where the green-white combers rolled and flashed upon the reef. A stretch of fine sand, edged by a clump of palms, gave shelter to innumerable pink crabs which burrowed out of sight as you advanced. Diminutive creatures they were, very unlike the black, spidery crabs that used to crawl and cluster round the outlet of the drain-pipe opposite the Marine and which seemed, literally, born of the black slime of that muddy beach. Yes, that is rather a pleasant memory, especially with the drive back through sugar-fields, the stars coming out one by one, the sweet air rising, and scattered lights glistening in far-off cottages; but I can give you a memory which is anything but pleasant, the memory of a Sunday spent at another inn along the coast, the dreariest Sunday of my life. I went out by the railway that brings all modern blessings to twenty miles of the Barbados flats and climbed up to this resort with half a dozen other travellers. What a place! A stuffed manatee and some copies of old magazines without their covers constituted, through that day, my only refuge from an incredibly exhausting and parochial view of surrounding isle and sea. But luckily every day has its end and the evening train carried me home at last. Think of calling the Marine Hotel home! My chief recreations there were the breakfasts of grilled flying-fish, the playing with the macaw in the backyard, and the discussions on religion with the negress washerwoman. A monotonous programme!

In the evenings I would saunter out along the beach or inland by the darkening gardens of villas or to the cluster of native huts upon the rise. I have an extraordinary recollection of calling once on an old lady—I must have met her on board ship—and of carrying on with her an intensely prim and prolonged

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conversation about nothing. Outside the frogs were croaking, the moon was shining; inside the old lady and I continued to make repeated and polite enquiries about one another and to lament the decay of manners and the spread of feminism. Why I went there and how I escaped I really don't know, but I suppose everything will be made clear to us one of these days. Meanwhile I have nothing more to say about Barbados.

No, I have nothing more to say, and I leave it now as gladly as I left it then. And if anyone accuses me of being inconsistent he can know little of life. You might as well accuse a child of being inconsistent for growing up. . . . I went to St. Lucia to stay with friends. It is in every respect the antithesis of Barbados, rising peaked out of the sea in great crags and forest-covered mountains. Much larger than the other, it has not a quarter of the people, and sugar is cultivated mainly in the deep valleys running down to the water. There is nothing tame about St. Lucia, but, like the other smaller islands of the West Indies, it has been the grave of many a hope and its white population appears to stagnate in an air of profound dejection. Indeed, a carking lassitude hangs over these islands like a pall, and even the visitor finds it hard to fight against its influence. It was night when we reached the mouth of the long harbour and Castries glittered low in the distance. My friend had come out to meet me and hailed me presently from his lantern'd boat. I joined him over the side and the negroes began to row us up the harbour between the walls of the vast out-jutting cliffs that closed gradually in upon us from the gloom. The lights ahead danced and grew with many a pin-point on the slope beneath the tenebrous mass of the hill shutting out the sky. Quietly, with hardly a ripple upon the luminous dark sheen, we drew in to the landing-stage and so towards the house of my friend through silent streets. It was an entry full of promise.

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Unfortunately the promise was in vain. I fell ill almost immediately and most of my time in St. Lucia was spent either in bed or in that toneless convalescence which turns the colour of the earth to drab. Still I was able to form a pretty clear idea of Castries and its environs. It is a dismal little town, hot and dusty, but it has the finest harbour in the West Indies, and steamers put in there to coal from all over the south Atlantic. Twenty thousand tons lie ever upon its begrimed wharves and ocean-tramps come hooting up the bay like enormous homing pigeons of the sea. The town lies in the cup of steep and splendid hills, and if you would view it as it really is not then must you climb the mountain paths and look down upon it from above. I used to take a horse and ride up to the unfinished barracks upon the spur. Beneath me Castries, white and shining, hugged the water and the hill, and the creased sea shimmered out to where, thirty miles across the gulf, the blue and airy profile of Martinique lay upon the ocean like an insubstantial morning cloud. I could never gaze at that scene without being filled with the illusion of a pristine world. There are, truly, few sights that could so affect one.

I wanted much to explore the rolling forests of the high interior, to seek out the fer-de-lance and that indigenous parrot which, I fancy, collectors have not yet quite exterminated, but, as I say, I fell ill and had to be content, in the main, with a view of a back-wall in Castries. When I got better I would stagger down daily to the Club and there, in a deserted upper room, would read the papers and quench my burning thirst in ginger ale. Rather a melancholy conclusion to my hopes! After a time, being recovered in health but still low in spirits, I thought I would make tracks for Europe by way of the Danish island of St. Thomas. The night of my departure was starless, following two days of wind, and even as we set out from Castries I

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felt the heave of the open sea come rocking gently upon the inmost harbour. Before us the porthole lights of the steamer shone, went out, and shone again like a row of lamps dipping on the water, and the foam of the waves flashed, livid and fitful, in the night ahead. The bell-buoy at the mouth boomed incessantly a note of warning. The two negroes shrieked as they pulled, the goaded boat leapt and shivered, and in a horror of great darkness we swung out beyond the mountain-horns into a raging sea. The amazing thing is that we ever made the ship at all. The boat in front of us, a four-oared boat, broke one of her oars, and had we done the same we should have been lost. Even when we did get under the steamer we were swept past her ladder again and again before we could seize the rope and clamber on deck. You have no idea how I felt! The danger and rush of these minutes had penetrated my being with a quite illogical sense of triumph. I was isolated in the death-like calm succeeding a storm. The baffled thunder of the sea was as nothing in my ears and I trod those planks as one who hears not the whisper of mortality. . . . But who laughs longest? —Before morning the sea had revenged itself upon me in a violent attack of sickness!

We just touched at Martinique and then on to Roseau in Dominica, whose square rampart of hill casts a green flooring on the roadstead with the shadow of its vegetation. I had time to land and take a solitary walk upon this isle of nutmegs and oranges. Fresh as a spring dawn it looked under the sparkling sky, girdled by the bright-hued sea, but here again I felt the ennui of the lesser islands. These are no homes for vigorous and ambitious men but rather for Buddhist dreamers or Celtic visionaries. . . . We sailed at noon and made for Antigua, before whose capital of St. John we lay anchored, without the harbour, for some few hours. It shows flat from the water and the white town is backed by plains where cattle might graze or

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sugar grow. I wasn't prepossessed. Leaving Antigua behind us we steamed north-westwards by Montserrat, whose lime-groves have suffered severely from the hurricanes, and so to conical Nevis (the unfortunate marriage-place of Nelson) and St. Kitts, from which it is divided by a narrow channel. At St. Kitts we organized a party and landed. There was a middle-aged Brazilian Jew, who kept peeping at one sideways, his giggling bride, an indefinable young man, the buxom full-figured wife of a Yankee sailing skipper, a lady in black who seemed to have fallen from the clouds, and myself. I don't know why it is that I always get hold of such odd collections. We wandered aimlessly across this small and most unpicturesque island and came out suddenly above a sea which broke and sprayed upon a reef of cruel rocks. Its haunting desolation abides with me to this hour. If ever I felt lonely it was then, in the midst of a strange company, on this dwarf isle, before that inhospitable coast. Our expedition was not much of a success and we speedily returned to Basseterre. There we went into a tea-shop and imbibed revolting temperance drinks, the colour of blood, in a back-parlour full of photographs and antimacassars. And so to the ship once more and out into the ocean without a sigh of regret. St. Kitts will not see me again.

Nor, to speak honestly, will St. Thomas. I don't know what the Americans will do with it, but the Danes had attempted to found there a miniature Copenhagen and had come rather to grief. Charlotte Amalie, itself, is quaintly unlike any British settlement of the West Indies, quaintly reminiscent of Europe, but its surroundings do not give it a fair chance. St. Thomas is a bare island on this side and the big hill that serves as background to its capital is not pleasing. Moreover, to trim the coves with evenly-placed white stones is hardly a suitable form of decoration to a tropic shore. Yet quaintness has its own appeal. At

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first glance Charlotte Amalie fascinates one with its neatness, its long street full of bay-rum factories, its Danish atmosphere. But the fascination soon wears thin. I stayed at a barn of an hotel above the harbour and suffered considerably from dirt and discomfort. There was nothing to do and I have almost forgotten my routine of feeble lounging. Thank God for small mercies! And then, at last, the steamer of my deliverance came smoking from up under the south and lay to in the roads. It was a blessèd sight. . . .

My happiest voyage to the West Indies, perhaps the happiest of all my voyages, was made in January 1908. It was a voyage of re-discovery, a short flight out of the English winter into the eternal summer of the Caribbean sea, and from the first gathering in the dark at Paddington until Jamaica burst again upon my eyes I was as one who awaits the dawn of day. Unfortunately you can never tell the really amusing things about voyages (or life) and even the second best can be but fragmentary, but I know that over that vessel there seemed to hover a real harmony and goodwill. Deceptive, you may say, the mere reflection of my own mind. Possibly—but the result was much the same. We were a genial party. Even when a stout lady rushed into the saloon one night, declaring indignantly that she had been pursued from the depths of the ship by an amorous drunkard, it appeared, upon investigation, that he had only been following her to apologise for accidentally brushing against her. He, like everyone else, had a character of almost universal benevolence—though I am bound to add that it required some faith to see it, especially when he tried subsequently to set fire to his cabin.

I would linger upon the memories of that voyage, upon the faces that shape themselves before me as I write, but, after all, this is no book of portraits. I wish it were. One could always invent diverting details about one's unknown friends and create types

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as easily as Lombroso creates criminals, but as to places, it is not so simple. People are episodic, meetings are casual, but the wild and far corners of the earth are fixed and substantial. In retrospect no one appears quite commonplace (not even intellectuals), and I am sure I could write a readable and tactful volume about the ordinary people I have met. But by the same token I might enter into some of their reminiscences and I will therefore refrain. It is my plan to mention only such as fit naturally into the structure of my work.

We sailed westwards, bearing to the south, until at length we made Bermuda on a day of rippling wind. It sheltered about its blue inlets like some preening bird flown up out of the dust and heat of the Tropics. At this season of the year Bermuda attracts the Americans in thousands. They come here in their drill suits and linen dresses with all their astonishing aptitude for pleasure. Two days' steaming carries them from frozen New York to this isle of gusty spring, a change as magical in its completeness as were the spells of Prospero worked so long ago within this vexed Bermoothès. I did not land but from afar tasted the delights of the island, which are as a breathing-space before summer, or as an ideal morning that will never set towards noon.

After we had remained there an hour or two we turned south in the direction of the Turk's Island passage. The last breath of cold had gone and over a sun-kissed sea we went gladly on our way. I remember sitting on deck that first afternoon out from Bermuda watching the coil and spin of the waves as one might watch the unrolling of an enigma. Beyond the horizon lay—Jamaica! In the gentle motion of the boat a sense of lulled excitement seemed to steal upon the ship, and in the deep rest the murmur of the Tropics whispered of the thrilling morrow. But need I describe such sensations? In one form or another

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they are the property of everyone, and with me they stood there in the unobtrusive background of my inner life. I tried to while away the time by reading a book on the West Indies, but it was a thankless task. Historians, topographers, and travellers have given us many a survey of these islands, but I am not sure that a single one of them is really satisfactory. The best known is, probably, Kingsley's *At Last!* which is not precisely a classic, and the most generally useful, perhaps, Aspinall's *Guide to the West Indies*, which is not precisely an encyclopædia. In regard to imaginative literature, some admirers of Lafcadio Hearn put his West Indian work above his Japanese, and as for stock short stories, we have all done them, I'm afraid—stories whose weak characterization passes muster in the riot of the local colour. It is easier to be a romantic than a realist.

I spoke about the corners of the earth being "fixed and substantial," but the term is, no doubt, relative, for I must say there appeared to be very little of the fixed or substantial about Turk's Island—which we reached a few days later. It lies flat on the sea as a board and you are upon it almost before you have sighted it. This northern coral reef of the West Indies is not luxuriant. Its population exists by dredging for sponges, by evaporating sea-water in huge pans, and by collecting pink pearls from the shell of the conch. This latter industry brings certain knowing darkies on board the infrequent steamers, who, inveigling you apart, will carefully unwrap a handkerchief and disclose to you the riches of the sea. They played this game with us, but had no success, and must have watched our departure with as complete an indifference as we watched the swift sinking of their isle. We were heading between Cuba and Hayti and when night fell the shores of the Black Republic sprawled upon our port.

Hayti has always fascinated people by the hinted

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rumours of its interior, where barbarism goes hand in hand with the most decorous social code and African idolatry oozes up under the guise of Catholicism. I don't so much mind naked savages dancing round fires, performing dreadful rites, but I strongly object to them if they wear frock-coats and silk hats. It infers the abnormal. Hayti has produced one remarkable man and a host of obscure, feather-nesting scoundrels, but she values her liberty and that is something. In the silence of the night we were steaming in lit-up radiance down her coast. It stretched before us, secret, dark, full of possibilities. No light was visible and, as one who keeps her thoughts to herself, biding her time, Hayti let us pass without a portent. Never did I feel more strongly all that is meant by the romance of contrast. Long did I gaze upon her from the glowing ship, upon that inscrutable and sable mass, and strange were my thoughts as I turned in before the paling of the stars. And on the morrow, lo, as the size of a man's hand, as the nimbus of a cloud, appeared upon the horizon the fairy shadow of the far Jamaica.

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XII

AT THE VICTORIA FALLS

I HAVE been wondering these two hours how I am to begin to write about the Victoria Falls. I have noticed that most descriptions start on an hysterical note and finish in the air and, though I would probably do the same if I felt like that, the truth is that I don't. No victim of imagination ever found the first sight of reality more flat. And yet through all my disappointment I am conscious of the feebleness of words to reproduce the roar and tumult of these waters. In the very anti-climax of my dream, under the shadow of a vaster image, I am stunned and deadened by the cataclysm. So let me, if I may, draw the balance between over-hope and acknowledgment of what is and describe to you these mighty Falls of the Zambesi in the least emotional of words. Lord knows the way has been paved for me, and as I can neither rise to the prose poem of the enthusiast nor achieve the detailed survey of the expert I will steer a middle course, the course so successfully followed by Livingstone, who gives in his *Missionary Travels* not only the first, but, perhaps, the most effective description of the Victoria Falls. It always seems to me that there was more of the explorer in Livingstone than of the saviour of souls. His writings appeal to one through that eager desire of his to see everything there was to see, to press on and on, to open out new horizons without any pronounced ulterior motive. He came to the Falls before they had been cheapened by the triumph of the tourist-spirit, while yet they thundered to the silence of the veld and the superstitious awe of trembling natives. He felt their lonely grandeur as we can never feel it now when civilization, in its most

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vulgar form, has put its meretricious hand upon their surroundings.

Is it, then, humanity, no less than a too vivid imagination, that has vitiated for me that rare impalpable which makes or mars our world? It helped, it helped. I had pictured the Rain Forest as a gloomy region of a hundred square miles, where the ground was soggy and the mist hung on the noxious trees—the reality is a glorified suburban shrubbery; I had supposed the land about the Zambesi to be tropical as Brazil—it is a desert; and, finally, I had thought of tourists as a mere speck swallowed in the riot of the jungle—they are the lords of the Victoria Falls. What a damned atmosphere they have given the place with their paths and notice-boards and rural seats, with their sheep-like chatter and their souvenirs, with the romantic names they have bestowed right and left! On Saturdays they arrive, on Tuesdays they depart, and in their mapped itinerary they undergo every thrill that ingenuity can summon from out the yeasty torrent. The gods have, indeed, granted to mankind a gift—the conquest of the sublime by the trivial!

Truly, the mentality of tourists (of whom, by the way, I am one myself) is of the most unchanging nature and deserves analysis. It matters not where you go, to the Yellowstone Park, the Tower, the Pyramids, or the Victoria Falls, you will hear precisely the same remarks by, apparently, precisely the same people. Are we all, then, we tourists, entirely commonplace or is this stupidity created in us by a kind of convention? I ask myself this just as I ask myself at bioscopes whether the actors in sentimental dramas are doing what we feel they should be doing or what the wire-pullers behind the scenes think we ought to feel. It is not so easy to answer, but I am inclined to believe that the whole thing is an example of hypnotism and that if left to themselves tourists and audience, alike, (I might even add, adherents of any

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one political party), would experience the ordinary disunity of mankind. But we are supposed to be fools by people who are probably cunning fools themselves and we allow ourselves to be completely victimized. There is not one of us but would be shocked at a tourist who propounded original or unpopular views, equally there is not one of us who is not irritated by the views they do propound. It's a delicate fabric, this fiction, and it's a point of honour with us to keep it intact. But let me leave the unprofitable subject.

I ought to be writing about the Victoria Falls—which brings me again to the difficulty of my earliest paragraph. . . . The mile-and-a-quarter-broad Zambesi, flowing calmly down from the rapids eight miles above, leaps suddenly into a chasm three hundred and fifty feet below and, clashing together from either rocky wall, roars out into a channel but a hundred feet wide. A dense vapour hovers eternally over this bellowing flood and the white mass of the water is utterly lost for you in the swirling cauldron of the mist. Rainbows of many a size, from little baby half-moons, faun-like amidst the wood, to great arcs spanning the river, dissolve and grow before you at every turn. The perilous banks are lined with trees and ferns, which, green and lustrous in the perpetual moisture, shake their dripping heads over the abyss. The senses reel and volition shivers within you as you stand gazing downwards while the spray envelops you in a shower and the sky is darkened overhead. At such moments, feeling insignificant as a beetle, I used to find a curious satisfaction in considering the scientific reasons of this upheaval. The geological explanations of a treatise, couched in dry and technical language, soothed me as nothing else could have done and brought back my senses from their uneasy trance. Poetry is all very well but, except in love, give me facts which, as far as I am concerned, have a superior

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influence in preserving a sense of proper human dignity.

The Falls do not form one sheet but are divided into several by the three islands that overhang the very lip of the crater. To best advantage can they be seen by wandering through the wood—the Rain Forest of popular renown—which covers the huge mass of rock that juts out from the southern bank, facing at right-angles the upper Zambesi and the sheer drop of the water. Lianas hang from the branches and ferns grow about the decaying roots of the trees. Openings from the wood give on to the abrupt edge, with sweeping gleams of the Falls across the gap. The veering wind blows the foam upon you like a storm or leaves you untouched upon the soaked and steaming rock, and the Falls light up for an instant only to be hidden again in the driving mist. As the Zambesi lowers towards the spring so is the volume of the spray decreased and the outline of the gorge made more apparent. When I was there the river was in flood and the seething underworld threw up its impenetrable curtain, hiding effectually the unravelled secrets of the pool.

Another favourite method of viewing the Falls is to step over the bridge into Northern Rhodesia and walk along the cleft known as the Knife Edge. The bridge, itself, crosses the river just below the Falls, whose spoondrift beats upon the windows of the passing trains. A corner of the tail shows clearly round the rock, and the water, howling out of its cavern, dashes furiously into the Boiling Pot and swings beneath the bridge, hundreds of feet below. Often have I bent over the railings and dropped pebbles into these eddying narrows. For forty miles the Zambesi zig-zags between precipitous and towering walls and the riven earth can be seen afar like a twisted knife-gash. The land is of equal level above and below the Falls and as you stand back over the tortured

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and discoloured cañyon you have only to raise your eyes to behold, through the opening of the trees, the blue and placid waters of the upper Zambesi. One cannot help doubting whether it be possible for that broad river to force its bulk into so insignificant a channel (two hundred feet deep though it is believed to be), or whether it be not more likely that much of the overflow gets carried underground by a subterranean tunnel to join up with the main race in the further east.

Between the railway and the Falls, some twenty minutes' walk from the Devil's Cataract, with a commanding view of the distant bridge and the first sweep of the gorge, an up-to-date hotel has been erected by the enterprise of capital. I loitered there three weeks in a state of suspended animation. The desolate bush-veld, spreading endlessly round the hotel, seemed to paralyse my activities and an adverse breath to hide from me the glory of the Falls. Though I saw much that was rare and delightful yet truly I scarce glimpsed what I had come to see. What could you expect? Man is only here on sufferance, the desert encroaches everlastingly, the termites are already eating into the woodwork of the house, and the baboons sidle up at night to steal the oranges from the orchard. Indeed, the commissariat would be hard put to it were it not for tinned salmon and condensed milk which, in the influx of tourists, at any rate, form a staple portion of the diet. But grumbling is a poor game. The Indian waiters did their best—especially the head-waiter, who had intense anxiety written on his face—excellent food bobbed up cork-like in the middle of the week, and the barman used to concoct a drink for me called a John Collins which had much to recommend it—though it is not as good as a Baron Romberg! If I was bored it was a boredom full of solace. And as evening came on I could still find a talisman in the sky. In my nightly strolls towards the bridge I would often startle a troop of

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baboons, foraging above the rocks, which would take clumsily to their heels at my approach, looking back to show their teeth and bark. Now, too, the hornbills swoop over with their dipping flight and the guinea-fowl begin to cackle amidst the grass. In the change of the wind the spray will wet your face and the roar of the Falls sound increasingly formidable in the dusk. The Kaffirs are going home to their kayas, the ant-armies still monopolize their corners of the road, and the lamps of the hotel begin to shine beyond the first bend of the river. Night has descended upon the Zambesi and the veld.

If the tourists were inclined to upset the organization, at least they brought life and gaiety upon the scene. Even when they were most numerous they did not ruffle my nights, apart from an occasional dance, as most of them disappeared to sleep in their special trains drawn up outside the station. I like dancing and I joined in. The recollection is not strong save of a "drummer" from Johannesburg who, between two waltzes, paraded a few eligible youths round the room while he periodically announced that if any ladies had been unable to secure partners he could now suit them. Exquisite tact! It was odd to think of "sitting out" by the Victoria Falls, but ever and again a couple would wander off in their direction and no doubt many a tender word was exchanged to the crashing of the waters. Man was not made to commune alone even with nature. . . . Another recreation offered on mail-nights, when one would walk up to the station across the few hundred yards of scrub and watch the train from the north come roaring in over the sand. It was fine to think of it steaming southward all through the hours of darkness and of the savage and fearful eyes, the eyes of the awakened veld, that would follow its progress, blinking and scowling at the horrid glare of the headlight. A few minutes of noise and activity, a last sight of the red, receding

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lamp, and then the unencumbered silence of the wild.

Save just above the Falls, where a sudden downward slope suggests the imminent plunge, the Zambesi opens to the view in a long reach of island-studded water. A narrow belt of tropic woodland fringes the banks, on which the smooth compass of the river laps with hardly a gurgle. A launch went frequently from the southern shore, a few hundred yards beyond the Falls, to Kandahar Island and the Livingstone landing-stage. The trip was an agreeable one even in the heat, and as you dodged from side to side the river you saw the anchored reeds floating with the current and the muddy sand-banks by the shore where the crocodiles, like abandoned logs, sun themselves and wait in hope. Our skipper was a Portuguese, a bombastic person of no particular competence, who was armed with a revolver that he used to draw in the most approved fashion whenever we neared the banks. The work of steering the launch amidst the shoals and shifting channels was performed by an impassive native, who was probably five times as useful as his officer at about a fifth of the salary. He wore habitually an expression of total indifference, which must have been very galling to such an actor as his baas. Listen to this: I remember going with a party once to Kandahar Island and lunching there under a canopy of trees. A winding path had been cut in the undergrowth and on that tiny island you might have fancied yourself all but lost in the most treacherous of forests. A few shots suddenly rang out sharply, and presently the skipper, accompanied by his graven adherent, pressed excitedly through the leaves and informed us that he had just shot "a duck as large as a man." Unfortunately he could not produce this monstrosity for our inspection because, as he kindly explained, a crocodile must have snapped it up as it fell into the water. And no wonder either!

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The native, standing like a shadow behind him, made not the faintest sign of assent or incredulity. I wonder if he kept his post ?

I explored, at various times, several of the Zambesi isles which are, one and all, real tropical oases in this barren land. On the larger ones, open glades break up the thick monotony of the trees and hippo come out of the river to wallow there in the slimy mire. From the branches are suspended pods and nuts in profusion, little pods full of the red-black lucky beans, nuts of vegetable ivory, pods weighing many pounds that bear a quaint resemblance to French loaves. The harsh scream of birds issues from the thicket-depths, far off in the wood or close at hand, as they flit invisible above your head. The eager growth of the jungle hems you about as though all the vegetation of the land were concentrated on the bosom of the great river. It is hard to credit that just beyond the banks the stunted bush-veld unrolls its desert vastness to the glare. But so it is, and the promise of the stream is as false as the promise of a mirage.

As sunset gathers the Zambesi wears a look of hushed repose. This is the hour to cruise upon the water in a canoe with four lusty black boys paddling as one man. The spray hangs over the abyss like a substantial cloud in the sky, and the rainbow, no longer an arc but a film, takes wing with the mist and dyes it with its melting hues. The music of the Falls seems voiced afar in that puff of white and the natives of old named them, "Smoke Soundeth There." Magic fears kept them at a distance from the furious sprite of the deep, and no white man, gazing fixedly into the Falls, but might feel at last his senses swimming and himself drawn into the vortex by a malignant power. But here, five miles away, the murmur and the cloud add only to the soft beauty of the twilight and on the calm quicksilver of the river one is conscious of a beatific peace. To me, as probably to many another,

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the Zambesi above the Falls is more attractive than are the Falls themselves.

The southern shore offers little to the pedestrian and a walk to the hotel-farm with its baobab tree, eighty odd feet in circumference, is about the limit of interest. But the northern shore is almost untraversed and well repays attention. Cross the bridge and turn to the left with the loop of the railway and again to the left where the Palm Grove slants obliquely downwards to the Boiling Pot or whirlpool of the outrushing water. This Pot is about five hundred feet across and its surface, in the words of Cana, " smooth at low water, is at flood-time troubled by slow, enormous swirls and heavy boilings." Once, at least, you should make the descent and see the deluge in its wrath as it reels from the giddy leap. Before you the bridge spans the river in the empyrean, and at your feet the coil bursts against the rock and, rebounding like the fragments of a shell, gathers itself together to shoot headlong down the reach. It is as if mad fear and rage had been let loose in the very heart of the waters.

But it is time we clambered back up the steep wooded path, for the Kaffirs who have followed us from the hotel must have unpacked the hamper by now and it is good to eat and rest before continuing on our way. I picnicked here on one occasion with some chance acquaintances. It was a merry enough meal and though, on reflection, the idea of devouring cold tongue under the drizzle of the Victoria Falls sounds incongruous, at the time, I remember, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. After we had sat talking for a while we took a footpath that guided us in isolated quiet along the northern shore. It would not be long now before all the green of the spring veld would mingle with the green fringe of the river-trees, but as yet the grass was withered and like hay ready for the scythe. Beware of this Rhodesian grass

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which, innocent to the eye as a ripe English field, pricks you as you march and leaves its fine-spun thorns within your flesh. Beware, too, of the sappy reeds: if you attempt to pluck them idly as you go by you are liable to be cut to the bone. Wasps could not be more vexatious than the Rhodesian veld, and I have often emerged from garnered Kaffir "lands" with blackjacks stuck as thickly in my trousers as quills in a porcupine. The inanimate and the animate seem to greet you with one ugly snarl, from the grass-seeds and the flies to the snakes and the beasts of prey. The native confronts such misfortunes with the fatalism bred of his existence, but it is astonishing that the white man has not utterly degenerated in these waste spaces. Examples there are, of course, many examples, but taken all in all the slow conquest of Rhodesia, incomplete as it be, is one of our triumphs. The legion that never was 'listed has pierced far beyond the confines of the railway, and to the Englishman, above all men, has been given dominion over the wilderness. This is not a mere boast—though sometimes the giving of a thing is, no doubt, synonymous with the taking thereof.

Trudging on a mile or two, we reached a clump of trees by the river's brink and there we rested in the shade. It was a delicious afternoon, so still and serene that not even the tiniest leaves stirred in the upper branches. Insects were busy in the grass, spiders'-webs hung by their gossamer from twig to twig, and we saw where the bushes were covered with last year's nests. And I thought of the spacious veld and of how, edging ever from the beaten track, the buck wander over its uninhabited plains. Yes, Rhodesia is the home of the shy game, and if, as I said, life appears to be leagued against you, is it not in a sort of universal, dumb defiance of man? Many an hour have I pored over Sclater and Stark's *Fauna of South Africa* (so much of which is concerned with this

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territory south of the Zambesi), and never can I open a volume of that work without sniffing, in an almost physical sense, the breath of the uncontaminated veld.

Thus did we repose awhile. None of us was inclined for speech, and wayward thoughts, such thoughts as are the first essential of true laziness, possessed us all. When we spoke we spoke at random. Even the small boy of the party who had danced ahead of us on the path, aiming at birds with an imaginary catapult and hearing the rustle of snakes that had no existence outside his fancy, now curled himself up quietly with his cheek upon his mother's lap. At last, the sun being yet high in the heavens, we got up and returned to our luncheon-ground for tea. But I had only drunk one cup when I discovered that my precious pencil had dropped out of my pocket. Asking them to wait, I quickly retraced my steps, found again that clump of trees, and began to search through every tuft of grass and to turn over every fallen leaf. In vain! Suddenly, without premeditation, in a kind of reaction from hard effort, I lay down on my back and stared up at the sky. And lying there I fell gradually into another reverie. Oh, this voiceless, inchoate country! Who is there could not understand your repulsion and your fascination, the weariness that sinks into your settlers, the whisper that summons them back to you from civilization? Who is there, indeed? It came to me then, this knowledge, as I lay and stared at the blue in the profound, the ominous silence of the Rhodesian afternoon. All at once I started to my feet. Time had passed without my knowing it and the shadows had deepened upon the river as, guilty and remorseful, I hurried back to my friends. They had already left. . . .

On rambles like this one is always apt to meet solitary white horsemen, dapper men in khaki uniforms, who seem to be ambling along with no object save to kill time. Make no mistake. They are the police of

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Rhodesia and, though only troopers or corporals for the most part, are people of real importance in their own sphere. Indeed, with the Native Commissioners, they constitute the actual rulers of the country and between them they strike confidence and terror into the black man's soul. In Southern and in Northern Rhodesia the police go under different names but their functions are, I gather, identical. Each month every farm throughout the whole land must be visited, complaints registered, wrongs investigated, and the report-book signed by the farmer himself. Their camps are sprinkled all over Rhodesia and the network of their rounds covers this vast dependency. At one time it was quite smart to belong to the Rhodesian police and younger sons competed for the vacancies, but the fashion has changed and five shillings a day plus aristocratic companionship is no longer the inducement it was. All the same, there is something rather remarkable about this organization which, in its unquestioned authority, might almost be likened to the guardias civiles of Spain. They have as henchmen the native police, a swarthy and sturdy set of men, whose bare legs are polished till they shine and whose devotion to British law and order must appear incomprehensible to themselves and outrageous to their dependents and friends. But I have come to the conclusion that the sense of discipline is one of the most inexplicable things in this inexplicable universe.

It was my fate to go twice to Livingstone, which, capital of Northern Rhodesia notwithstanding, seat of Government, and only town boasting a newspaper—not a bad paper either, a weekly—has yet a white population of but three hundred and is in every respect, save in its capacity for growing paw-paws, a most deplorable spot. It is situated three and a half miles from the Zambesi, to which river it is joined by a trolley-line, and it has the appearance of having been accidentally dropped amidst the sandy veld. To

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walk through the streets of Livingstone is to feel, even more powerfully than in the towns of Southern Rhodesia, the fatuity of urban life in such a country. The veld is great and its life is free, but petty listlessness poisons inevitably the air of the stagnating centres. Natives, I think, are even more markedly victims of this ennui than are whites, but I am half-inclined to make an exception of the Livingstone natives, into whose base hearts a mania for money has been instilled. No sooner does a body of tourists arrive from the hotel than they are swamped by an imploring and, I fear, disingenuous throng, who chatter like apes and wave the crudest of crude curios in their faces. Nor do they by any means undervalue their wares or consent to cheese-paring in the price. If you want to buy, buy in God's name, but you will repent it later. That's all the advice I have to offer. . . .

The Cape to Cairo railway passes Livingstone on its north-bound course, seven miles above the Victoria Falls, and a big mineral traffic is for ever moving up and down the line—Wankies coke for the Congo and copper ore southwards from Katanga. I think no one could gaze upon this railway, traversing the Dark Continent from Cape Town to the tropic jungles, without some emotion. There it stretches, like a blind instinct feeling for the North, like a giant accomplishment of which man knows not yet the real significance. I have always experienced in Rhodesia unique allurement from these long journeys through the virgin bush. Coming late into the field, the railway has all the attraction of the utterly modern outlined against the utterly untamed. I remember once travelling there in a goods-van at night and peering backwards with a kind of joy upon the lonely miles. The raked ashes of the fire-box fell glowing upon the track, and the grass burst into constant flame as we lumbered by. No sign of life on the wide expanse, no echo of humanity, but only the rocking of

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the van and the little spurts of fire along the veld. It was very wonderful. But let me end this paragraph on a more prosaic key—were it not for the fire-belt, or cleared path, some thirty yards on either side the line, the railway, which has been the making of Rhodesia, would have been its ruin. The veld is as inflammable as a match and the pastoral wealth of the country could be turned to-morrow into a graveyard of lost endeavour.

But I did not go to the Victoria Falls to write of Livingstone village or of railways. Come, sit with me again beside the enchanted waters ere yet the moon has risen or sleep has beguiled us. It is useless to whisper here and loud talk suits neither the hour nor place. See where the foam flashes in ghastly whiteness across the gulf and where the rainbow, large and luminous above the trees, dips its further arc into the nadir of the abyss. A cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night! The boom of the water shakes the very air and the darkness, itself, is stirred. Can you not imagine now that we are all alone and that even the railway is but a figment of our brain? To-night the Falls have entered into their kingdom once more, and man, the spoiler, has been vanquished. The merciful obscurity has given back to nature its primitive appeal and, in the illusion of recovered dominion, this sight of the world has slipped from off its shoulders all the tinsel frilling of our minds. It is the last time, the last visit, and well is it for us that night has shown us this victory. In the august triumph of the hour we can sit here as in the peace of a forfeited identity. And so let us depart at length, drugged and weary, before the cock crow or the first dawn-streak brighten in the east.

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XIII

SOME FRENCH MEMORIES

A SUMMER night on the Channel, with flickers along the horizon and the murmur of the sea coming up in breaths from out the deep, tempts one to linger on deck and wait there for the lights of France. How wonderful it is, after a long sojourn in England, to catch those first glimpses of foreign harbour-lamps! There is a feeling of buoyant emancipation, a feeling of escape, and the guttural French voices sound across the gloom like a special cry of welcome. Dieppe is the ideal port for a summer crossing: starting thence in the grey twilight you will run into Paris while the morning still lies fresh upon the watered streets and all the girls are going to work with their black shawls round their bare heads. The fiacre rumbles over the empty pavements and the unshaved cabman, with his cloak flapping and his hard, shiny hat pressed over his eyebrows, nods upon the seat. Blue-smocked men are drinking at the estaminets and ownerless dogs yawn at the mouths of alleyways or bark aimlessly at cats pricking daintily along the walls. The Queen of Cities is rousing from her short sleep and the smell of coffee and hot rolls mingles with the woodland smells of June borne in upon the chaste air of the refreshed day.

After all, Paris, like London and New York, is at her best in early summer, though it must be sufficiently advanced to let you sip your absinthe (a drink I detest) or syrup outside her cafés of an evening and watch, in comfort, her ebb and flow. Paris without her cafés is so inconceivable that a Parisian life without a café life means nothing. Every night I return with pleasure to these central haunts, to some café in the

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streets near by the Louvre, where the hum of talk and the nocturnal sights are worth all the interest of the Jardin des Plantes with its unkempt animals, all the vistas of Versailles and its trees, all the fairness of the Seine near Sèvres. I think it is here, rather than in the Latin Quarter, that the real, the unaffected Paris has its being. I dislike Bohemianism, which is very generally a mere pose of talent, and though the other side of the river may be more typical in parts, in so much as it is more French, it has not that vitality of movement that is all-necessary.

No, and I might add that it has not that fantastic quality, which, finding its outward symbol in the Eiffel Tower, is insinuated into the very fibre of central Paris. The romantics discovered it and the poets of decadence played upon the theme with their magic flutes, until now, like the naked emperor of the story, it is espied of all. At its best it is unselfconscious, another facet of the personality of Paris, and even when it is assumed, the assumption is but a natural privilege. One evening, I recall, as I was strolling down from the Place de l'Opéra, I ran into a man dressed as for a wedding, with a buttonhole, an eyeglass, and white spats, who was blocking up the path, pointing with his cane to a closed window. After a few seconds of immobility he sprang to attention, at the same time rattling the point over the ribbed wood, and then slowly once more brought round the cane towards the shutter. This performance he repeated for a full half-hour, and while I watched him then I pictured how Stevenson would have enjoyed the scene and how, as he stood there under the lamplight, in the shadow of the gathering crowd, he would have woven around this enterprising advertiser of a new restaurant a plot worthy of the ingenuity of Prince Florizel or the young gentleman with the cream tarts. But the innate fantastic quality of Paris is an aroma hard to analyse. The receptive town throws upon all her

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guests the glamour of her spell, taking from each what he can give, and handing, in return, the right of her citizenship. Thus, lolling on your metal chair beside a dusty planted bush, you will descry all Europe pass before you in its disguised Parisianism, and feel, as in the air, that freedom, critical and eclectic, which scoffs and excuses at the self-same instant. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*—well, perhaps, though I don't myself quite see why. . . . Paris binds you with a silken thread, and, though she be curious and tolerant, yet, in her heart, she despises you until she has wrapped you around and made you hers. It is this apparent charity that encourages licence in the bad breeding of an occasional tourist, already half-intoxicated by the change, and causes a Frenchman to turn contemptuously from the sight of a char-à-banc. We English make a fatal mistake in behaving abroad otherwise than we would at home.

Talking of home, it is a recognized fact that the Parisian entertains little at his and that you must be on intimate terms before you may expect such invitations. He likes to meet you on neutral ground and in that he is wise. Few travellers know anything about French family life and quite a number imagine there is nothing to know. A mistake, of course, and one fostered by the appearance of the overflowing midnight cafés. Domesticity is a science in France and the "gallantry" of husbands respects the outward integrity of the home. Liaisons have no particular tendency to culminate in divorce, for, as your wife was chosen for you on account of family reasons, why should you wish to be quit of her because you have chosen a mistress on account of personal reasons? The tragedy of love grown cold is enacted in another's house and scandal is avoided in the lack of legal ties. The dévote has often a free-thinking politician for a husband, but there are few clashes and the children are reared in an impartial and friendly manner. We

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could not do these things in England, but we should not wish to. It is one system against another.

To change the plot and go from ugly humanity to a lovely wood! In no other city of which I have acquaintance is there any real equivalent for the Bois de Boulogne, with its spaciousness (it is over 2,000 acres in extent), its Jardin d'Acclimatation, and its forest-glades. Nurses bring hither their charges to play in the morning and lovers walk there in the honeyed night. It is from the Bois that Paris draws her life and it is to the Bois that the tradesman leads his family of a Sunday afternoon. The rich drive along its border, the poor rest in its shade, and I daresay that even the apache has discovered it by now, if he remain not faithful to the outer districts and the fortifications. Sometimes I walk up from the Arc de Triomphe and plunge into the Bois as into a scented bath, and, coming back, I like to stop at one of the cafés in the Champs Elysées and have a cool, long drink before continuing Parisward. A tired crowd is passing over the bridges at this hour and the population of the suburbs is hurrying to its far-off homes and its twilight digging in little gardens. Paris is drawing her latest breath of day and in another hour, at most, the revelry of night will have begun and the lamps will be shining along the Seine.

Ah, there you have the only progenitor of Paris, just as in the Thames you have the only progenitor of London—though to compare them as streams is to compare a laughing pygmy to a sombre giant. The soul of Paris dwells upon her river. The steamers puffing up and down, the rows of fishermen, the bathing-houses, the barges unloading cement, the old bookstalls on the further bank—all this is Paris of the Parisians in its air of gaiety and vivaciousness. But this air, itself, is to some extent a figment, as you will soon learn. No one works harder than your average Parisian, no one takes his pleasures more keenly or is

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more resolved to throw into his very toil the atmosphere of a holiday. Thus Paris appears light when she is only light-hearted and thus the idle visitor is apt to suppose himself in a paradise of pleasure when he is only in a school of philosophy. The Parisian treats his river as a friend and, through this witness to the immortality of Paris, he lives, as it were, a double existence both as man and as citizen of the capital of France. As with memory, the waters of the Seine wash out the débris of the past in the clear flow of their perennial youth. What remains is but the continuity of great history.

Of the famous buildings of Paris I would no more write than I would write of the famous buildings of London, though I must confess that I can never look at Notre-Dame, with its gargoyles, its Gothic tumult, and its fluttering pigeons, without being reminded of the gigantic sprawl of Medieval France and of a Rabelais born before his time. It cannot compare with Châtres or Rheims but it is magnificent and most truly French. It is in their Cathedrals, indeed, that the old genius of France, England, Spain, and Italy flares so eloquently and with so final a differentiation. . . . Behind Notre-Dame lies a building of a very contrary nature—the Morgue. When I first used to visit Paris this clearing-house for violent deaths was open to the public and I really believe that a day seldom went by without my paying it a visit. These wax-like faces would fascinate me, and the trickling disinfectant behind the glass seemed like a desecration on that attentive audience of the dead. There they sat, absorbed and patient, as though listening to a strain too fine for pulsing ears; and I, gazing at them, felt how the mystery of death was swallowed in the vaster mystery of the life or the not-life to come. Ah, well, that is long ago! The Morgue has been closed this many a year to all save genuine enquirers, and tourist and gamin, alike, have lost a gruesome

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sensation. Paris is not what it was and the saddened visitor turns from the barred doors as if he had been done out of his proper right. The City of Pleasure has put away her main attraction and you must now go to one of these Montmartre cabarets, where a gentleman will dissolve before you into a skeleton, to obtain the correct thrill. Very painful!

This mention of cabarets reminds me that there must be something invincibly British in my aspect, for I can seldom emerge from an hotel without being accosted, in my own language, by some tout who is anxious to conduct me that same night to "a place I know of." I have never been in the least attracted by such invitations—this form of pleasure paid for in hard cash is becoming more and more obsolete—nor, to tell you the truth, have I ever been attracted by the shady literature displayed in the shop windows of Parisian side-streets for the express purpose of making Englishmen and Americans pay exorbitant prices for worthless publications. The titles are more suggestive than improper, the contents are, probably, more improper than suggestive, and as for the illustrations they are merely unclothed. If people want to peruse such books why on earth don't they sit down privately and write something absolutely suitable to their own needs?—they could invariably go one better than the printed word! But the point is, I presume, that it's not your imagination that you find enthralling, it's the imagination of the other man. But this is not an exalted subject.

Let us think of another kind of appetite. Has it ever occurred to you that if it were for the French asparagus, alone, the bisque soup, and the petits pois at the Café de la Paix, Paris would deserve a visit, just as Ostend (as I happen to know from experience) used to deserve a visit on account of the excellence of the local turbot? I ask whether it has ever occurred to you, because it is a point of some importance.

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Beware of the country that has no special dishes—it has probably no special virtues either! But succulent as is French cookery, I fancy it is overrated at the expense of British. Mind, I speak of the good cookery of each country; the bad is equally below zero. The elaboration of sauces is not a marvel and if you frequent cheap restaurants—as I usually do in spite of anything I may say—I prefer my simple dishes undisguised. Moreover, this talk of French bread being superior to British bread always annoys me. It somehow doesn't ring true (there are exceptions, of course), and reminds me of those people one meets on the steamer who speak in broken English after a three days' visit to the Continent. Enough on gastronomy! Paris, unlike Ostend, does not appeal only to one's palate. Well, hardly! There are her women, for instance, women who have carried the art of the feminine to its utmost and whose every glance is like a billet-doux. They are not pretty—there are ten pretty women in London for every Parisian beauty, who even so is generally a grisette—but they have, every one of them, a pervasiveness of sex and they know how to dress and how to mould their figures. This frank appeal to the male, a frankness which is natural and in itself a form of protection, is quite enchanting. The Frenchwoman understands men thoroughly within her limits and, when she loves, she loves passionately, completely, but without illusions. For she is still woman, Latin, and extremist. The Frenchman, on the other hand, cynic and opportunist as he be, is, like all men, more idealistic in such matters and is capable of high seriousness and murderous jealousy. Thus does the crime passionel flourish in this sane and balanced nation and thus is it comprehended as a momentary and forgivable insanity.

These observations suggest to my mind the two authors in whose works, especially, the atmosphere and psychology of this city are revealed—Balzac and

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Daudet. Who could forget the boarding-house in *Le Père Goriot* or the business-place of the sham Englishman in *Les Rois en Exil*? And of the two, perhaps Daudet is the greater master, so finished and detailed is he and with so little of the bizarre in his realism. To me, his books are like the music of Rameau or the painting of Harpignies, delicious in melody and colour and touching in their deep humanity. But if one is going to discuss French novelists there will be no room left for Paris.

In the wintry weather the city draws more into herself and her greeting is less certain. The roaring Channel seems to warn you against the attempt and, though I am not much given to sea-sickness, I have landed more than once dizzy from the short, sharp pitching. No five hours' steam to Dieppe on such a day, but the swift crossing to Calais or Boulogne! It is good to press into the douane and on into your corner of the train that will carry you presently far from sand-dunes and the cold, salt wind into fields of intensive culture, with their wooded patches darkening already and their white farms fading in the lowering afternoon. The lights of Paris are rosy in the dusk and rosier still as you speed away south to the Riviera or south-east to Switzerland and midmost winter. Oh, that feeling of being "abroad" when, as you unfold your rug in the dark, you hear the whistle of the French locomotives rise to its crescendo and die away like the notes of a curlew! The querulous gruffness of our English engines has none of that untamed spontaneity, none of that savage wildness, and if one has to be an islander to experience the full force of the contrast then give me, every month, the angriest of Channel waves.

Journeys in France are, indeed, like poems in the memory, for this land is romantic as is no other in Europe. I am fond of picking up the map and imagining all sorts of little tours to her out-of-the-way

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corners. You know beforehand she will never disappoint you. In her every variation and her every mood, amid the sluggish streams and pollarded willows of the north, the hilly, wooded country towards the Alsatian frontier, the sun-baked plains and sandstone cliffs around Avignon, there is that inner harmony and sure response to the one voice of France. In glimpses I have seen her widely, but, save for Paris, it is in Brittany and Normandy alone that I have wandered at leisure. Several times have I made the all-night crossing to St. Malo, that picturesque centre of modern resorts, swum in those seas, and rested in the cornfields about Dinard. This last is a town rather spoilt by fashionable Parisians of a set that ape, but cannot emulate, the Faubourg St. Germain. It is not easy to catch the tone of the exclusive and impotent French aristocracy, as even Henry James found in one of his few creative failures, and, though the Dinard throng has its rings within rings and is bespattered with titles, it is not the true article by a long way. The Faubourg St. Germain does not advertise itself, and if the Camelots du Roi are noisy they are probably odious to the true scions of the Old Régime. . . . Yes, if it were not for its society, Dinard would be agreeable enough, and, even as it is, I have lost money at baccarat there (certainly not very much!) and thought it none too dear a price to pay for the amusement. But it is inland, away from the froth that the sea's froth brings upon the coast, that you will find reality in the orchards of farms and the lanes of village streets. Bowed over the sod, the unchanging peasant carries on his work, and figures from Millet and Maupassant, those twin interpreters, surround you in all the bitten adamant of their northern lives. From the secretive and suspicious glances that follow your every movement, from the evasive answers, from the staring of the children, you might surmise that you had fallen from another planet. In truth, an Englishman is as much

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an enigma to a French peasant as a Chinaman would be. Like other peasants he belittles what he is not accustomed to, but it would be interesting to put, say, a Wiltshire labourer down here and note whether he and the French labourer would discover a kind of mutual rapport without the vain necessity of words. I am rather inclined to think they would: the peasants of all real nations, the uncontaminated peasants of the soil, have certain characteristics in common in their dislike of strangers (not alone from other countries) and in a voiceless love of the earth tilled by their ancestors. Not but what they have their own national traits, though such traits are often, no doubt, more accurately represented in other classes, and, as to France, may be seen at their clearest in the bourgeois. The difficulty of understanding nations, like the difficulty of understanding women, arises from the fact that the accepted generalizations about them are true in perspective but very misleading in proximity. The French motto of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity covers, indeed, the mentality of three nations—Liberty in England, Equality in France, Fraternity in Russia—and till one has grasped this truth one is bound to find the French attitude rather incomprehensible. Frenchmen with their polished manners and brutal incisiveness, Frenchwomen with their femininity and hardness, seem almost paradoxical to the English mind, whereas, in reality, they are only French and not British. There is much less sentimentalism in France than in England, where the Saxon haziness has given place to the Latin logic.

I have only one French friend and even with him, like him as I do, I cannot be entirely natural. There is none of that freemasonry of humour as between Englishmen—who, by the way, ever felt inclined to laugh in a French music-hall?—none of those silences that cement friendship. His conversation is like an adventure in Gallic wit and he writes unrivalled

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letters, but, though I treasure him, it is more as one treasures an acquired work of art than a family heirloom. I am not sure that the English will ever penetrate with sympathy to the nuances of the French, any more than I think that the French will ever understand the English. Indeed, one might go further and say that all nations instinctively dislike and distrust one another and that the idea of internationalism is inherently against nature. Let the psychologists determine. When civilities are over and generalities have been discussed then comes the rub. You are up against the blank wall of an attitude so subtly antagonistic that you scarce can even tell in what the antagonism lies. Stop when you discover that; it is much better to accept national differences for what they are. You won't get over them. France I love, her inhabitants I like, her language I weary of. It is a simple creed and, in its dogmatic narrowness of scope, avoids all controversy.

There are many things about the English that make French people smile, but the position could be reversed with propriety. Take the French amour, for example, which is conceded in France with a kind of public gravity that appears to us a trifle absurd. It is nothing to deceive your husband, it is shocking to deceive your lover—as Anatole France has pointed out in one of the most ironical of his novels. And yet, perhaps, it follows naturally enough upon their recognized philosophy of matrimony. I remember, when I was at Dinard, being shown an erring couple who were conducting their affair with the sober approval and sympathy of half the population. She was the ordinary Frenchwoman of thirty, not pretty but chic, he was younger, wore stays, and had an air of conscious rectitude, as though embarked upon the one praiseworthy action of his life. People used to watch him on the way to pay his afternoon call as if he were doing something commendable and perilous—I believe

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the husband was expected down any day from Paris, one of those white-moustached old gentlemen who attend the Bourse with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in their buttonhole. As for the lady, she made her daily appearance on the beach with an expression of intense exaltation and in a frock quite becoming to the mood. Altogether, it was farcical and one couldn't help wondering whether the actors, themselves, were not living in a play-world of emotions.

Not far from Dinard, with its tennis-clubs and cercles privés, there is a decidedly modest watering-place called St. Enogat, much patronized by economical French and English families, and where, for about eight francs a day, they did you uncommonly well. It was hardly the sort of place one would choose of one's own accord, and the few times I have been there squabbles as to precedence, etcetera, have been rife, but it had its advantages in its bathing, in its cheapness, and in its view of the lighthouse upon the St. Malo rocks. Each evening, when the harvest moon had waned, I walked along the beach and saw the long beam pierce the rippling sea. How degrading then appeared the wrangle as to who should get the langouste snacks and how insufferable the droning voice of my companion from the hotel, whose socialistic irrelevancies not even a night like this could quench! He was obsessed by the intellectual force and moral grandeur of Bernard Shaw. "Damn it all," I used to think, "is the fellow never going to stop! I don't want to hear this; I'm not one of the discontented nieces of a South Kensington doctor!" Aloud I would murmur:

"My dear chap, you are entirely right; he's got an astonishing intellect. But just look at that sea!"

"Yes, it's very fine. But did you ever read what he wrote about Bunyan and Shakespeare?

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The insight of the man! You can't get away from it!"

"Ah, extraordinary, but shouldn't we be returning?"

If I couldn't get away from it, I could get away from him. . . .

From St. Enogat, the celebrated Mont St. Michel is easily accessible and, once across the bay, makes but a short run by train. Thither, on a hot August morn, I set forward in pious pilgrimage. The causeway that then carried one from the mainland to the Mount has, I gather, been demolished and this glorious relic of the Middle Ages now rears itself in solitude upon its isle of rock, within the rim of Cancale Bay. In innumerable pools and glistening rivulets the sand spreads far around and at the turning of the tide the water races landward with the speed of a horse. The spirit of Faith dominates these reaches and the great emblem of Christianity points like a beacon above the waste. The ruins are beyond compare, but a parasitic hamlet of souvenir-shops hangs upon the lower walls and even the omelettes of Poulard Aîné are no compensation to the outraged senses. Is there anything more disgusting than such base exploitation of the past, or more contemptible than such transmuting into gold of a forsaken creed? Some hours did I spend at Mont St. Michel, but they were hours of dwindling satisfaction—the solemnity of the scene has been hopelessly desecrated.

On my way back I got out at a country station of the Chemin de Fer de l'Est. The sun was setting and all the fields of Brittany shone yellow in the golden light. Beneath the peach trees of the village inn half a dozen soldiers, in faded red and blue, had settled round a little table; goods-wagons were being lazily shunted up and down the track. The perfect dusk of summer, relaxed and murmurous, had changed the sky to green, and the ovened earth sighed in the cooling

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eve. France, herself, seemed to interpenetrate all, the same France that ripens the grapes and lemons of the south, that brings winter snow upon the Vosges, France the indestructible, the wise, the centre of modern thought and art and civilization. No wonder we think of her as the beloved Mother and Mistress of the World!

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XIV

TRAVELLED ENGLAND

THERE is something in the very name of England that sounds like a sweet trumpet across distant seas and I do not envy the man who, voyaging wide over the earth, returns homeward without emotion. The bloom of her early summers, in all the variety of northern moor and southern meadow, her slow-dying dusks, and the delicious woodland scents renewed for ever out of the earth make of England, herself, the very call of our blood. Between April and October the English country yields to you the riches of her great beauty, the charm of her moods, the refreshment of an individuality that neither withers nor wearies. Yes, yes—but save me from the English winter! The misery of a slough of despond settles, in slush and cold, upon the numbed land and the unimpressive grip of her winter—a winter no more resembling the real winter of the North than a peevish irritation resembles a consuming hate—hangs in rainy fog upon the dripping trees and sodden roads. Once and for all let us put it out of our heads. I would write about England only in the leafy prime of the year when, like a picture of ever-changing delight, the hand of the summer lies warmly on all her counties. My whole chapter can be but a generalization, for, though I know her patchily from Northumberland to Kent, from Norfolk to Cornwall, yet I have no wish and no space to follow in prose the topographical details of local writers or to wade amidst the niceties of county history. No realm has been written of to the extent of England, but from out that mass of literature there is one class of book I would select as the most felicitously appropriate to an

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understanding of the English countryside, and that is the class which, in the hands of prose poets like Jeffries and Hudson, treats of the peasants, the animals, and the open air as a very symbol of the heart of rural England. These beautiful works deal tenderly, in their realism, with the spirit of the ideal and speak to us with the clearness of running brooks and the sadness of lingering sunsets. But for one passionate glimpse of the English summer, of summer teeming with the swift illusions of love and youth, I know of nothing to equal the verses of Meredith's *Love in the Valley*. It is worth ten thousand lines of old Drayton's pedantic and meticulous epic, not to mention all the lively pages of Cobbett, and will be remembered, surely, when the novels of its author are recalled mainly as the singular eccentricities of a sane temperament and as the classic result of mid-Victorian theories on individualism in art. On any summer eve in any part of the land you can read the stanzas and rejoice that England, so diverse in her temperaments and scenery, can yet be evoked to her universal core by the ardour of a lover tuned to the embracing touch of the mysterious summer.

> "Happy happy time, when the white star hovers
> Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew"

When we consider the sheer variety of England, which, in its small area, can give us the glamour of a continent, we see what a unique achievement it really is. In their unselfconscious way Chaucer and Shakespeare were redolent of English soil, but amongst the moderns of the last hundred years the tendency has been towards the individual interpretation of particular places and atmospheres. The mania for specialization, which appears to have conquered everything from history to stamp-collecting, has invaded the realism of art and there is scarce a county or tract which is not reflected especially in the paintings, the

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folk-songs, or the literature of some remarkable man or of the very genius of the locality. Wordsworth is no more of the Lakes than Crome is of the Broads, and the Sussex of Hilaire Belloc is divided by a sharp line from the Wessex of Thomas Hardy. But England, after all, is not to be discovered from a study-window (ridiculous expression !), and we may just as well forget these artificial aids at once.

It may be inferred from what I have said that all England is dear to me, but most certainly it is otherwise. My knowledge of it, at the best, would only make dots upon a map, and of these dots full many a one would be unillumined. For instance, I do not like Cumberland, whose rugged hills and embosomed lakes —even the sombre Wastwater—have become a tourists' elysium, but I love Northumberland, which yields to me, in all its subtle difference, the true wild breath of the English Border ; I do not like Surrey, whose rural solitudes are sprinkled with neat villas and whose very heath and woods have an air of sham rusticity, but I love Kent, which is unspoilt and not given over to the clutches of artists ; I do not like Essex, which is feebly depressing, but I love Norfolk, with its sad wastes and its great sea-meadows where the pink-footed grey geese, flying from the cold of the Siberian tundras, feed in the late autumn and the winter ; I do not like Gloucestershire, with its hillocks, but I love Lincolnshire, with its fens ; I do not like Hertfordshire, in spite of Jacobean Hatfield, but I love Buckinghamshire, in spite of—oh, I don't know, several things. But this list is getting monotonous and I will cease, only remarking by way of finish that people have probably more to do with my tastes than I am prepared to admit.

Yes, the touchstone of happiness lies deep in the recollection of friendship and in this respect I have been, I think, extremely fortunate. My dearest friends in the English counties have lived far apart as

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Northumberland and Kent, and it was as consummate a triumph for me to bring them together as it was for the scheming Boswell to bring about a meeting between Johnson and Wilkes. How could I forget those days in Northumberland, the long hunts for plovers' eggs in the bleak spring when the wail of the birds filled all the ebbing dusk, the summer walks by tarn and fell towards Wooler, the excursions about the boundaries of Chillingham, where the wild white cattle wander in the bracken beneath, and to the shores of Holy Island? And how could I forget my days in Kent, with the warm, still twilights descending upon the level fields, the young oak woods glistening afar, and the talk of my friend, so wise and profound, to fill up the gaps of silence, as we sat by the mote and he discoursed of foreign politics and the essence of literature?

A mental comparison between these two favourite counties is recurrent in my mind. The unadorned, grey farmhouses of Northumberland fit as appropriately into the northern landscape as do the cosy, brick-red homesteads of Kent into that of the southern county; and its vast medieval castles—Bamburgh frowning on its basaltic rock above the sea, lordly Alnwick, ruined and stately Dunstanborough—are as inevitable to the eye and to one's local sense of the past as are Knole, Leeds, or Penshurst. There is a kind of splendid sternness about the Northumberland side of the Border, as though, after hundreds of years of peace, it still kept unsleeping watch upon the Scottish marches. The barren stretches of its moors and the sullen outline of its ranges compose the basis of that special atmosphere which is the wind-swept charm of Northumberland. The romance of its lawless past is reflected in the darkling face of the land and its personality is, indeed, one to keep history silently alive. And as for Kent, is not that county the very epitome of the English spirit of good-will and fair haven? To call it the Garden of England is no

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exaggeration, for the richness of its soil, augmented by centuries of civilized cultivation and hospitable plenitude, has endowed it in a very special way with a homeliness that is neither tame nor trite. In Kent, above all counties, lies the backbone of the national character on its happier side, and in Kent, above all counties, is England revealed again to the wanderer. It mirrors the unperishable in the spaciousness of its broad and living acres.

People in bulk take on surprisingly the tone of their vicinity, but individuals refuse classification. I have known, in my day, many able men, a few women whose compassionate tenderness or thrilling femininity gave to them a genius of personality higher than the vivaciousness of the most advanced females, but this thought of friends reminds me that I have met but five or six people, and these all men, of the most dazzling intellectual order. To me there is something endlessly exhilarating in the really first-class mind, the mind of ideas. It never disappoints. But death has been at work within my circle and I am not consoled. Above all do I mourn the loss of T. E. Hulme—the celebrated 'T. H.' of those pre-war Friday gatherings—and it is only now I am beginning to realize that it can be true. Death plays with us a trick like to that of a clock. There is a pause in which it seems not, just as there is a pause in which time seems not; and then the invisible and the visible hands have moved and we know that another life and another minute have passed for ever. Of all the men of my generation I had either met or heard of, he was the most extraordinary and the most invincible. Feared by those whom he disliked, admired by all, beloved of his intimates, he met a soldier's death in 1917. But there are many, even yet, who cannot bear to think of it and who feel it as an utter disaster for the world of to-morrow. "One by one time takes them home that we loved, the fair names and famous." . . . There are,

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perhaps, thirty people, men and women and children, who make all the difference in one's life and it is terrible to contemplate how stark would be its emptiness without their faces. . . .

The dim, soft twilights of the English June give me, at times, a ghostly sense of trouble beneath their surface. A feeling of dormant sadness lurks upon the edge of the green woods and, in the coalescing of the shadows, the velvet texture of the scene has taken on a hint of pagan unrest. Slowly one walks along a meadow path, with the smells of June around one and its tremendous whisper within one's ears, and yet in this delicious hour, when the balance of the world seems fairest and all the earth is like a dream, the heart is often oppressed by pain and a suggestion of inappeasable sorrow. I have not, myself, any strong belief in the benignancy of nature, which appears to me to play with man as a purring cat plays with a mouse, and I fancy that the "Oneness of man and nature" has about as much truth in it as most of these pantheistic methods of being religious by avoiding dogma. No, the heart of nature, like the heart of man, is troubled by evil, and here, as I sit under this high-banked hedge all tangled with wild rose and clematis, I see, as it were, the leering face of a hoofed satyr in the brake. Away with whims!—the bird-calls in the wood are growing less, the mists are rising, and night, with its circling and inevitable tread, is placing its first sentries in the sky. Let me on; I want to find comfort from the village lamps shining below.

I am fond of walking, but the kind of walk I like is the walk of the field-naturalist, the walk that brings one home across country between lunch and tea. Give me the dusk for contemplation and the dawn—in spite of poets—for sweetest slumber. I am not envious of precocious energy and I dislike professional walking as much as I dislike professional motoring.

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My Kentish friends rather share my view; they walk not and they motor only with the distilled pleasure that will unfold trim Romney Marsh and all its Saxon churches in a summer afternoon—but my Northumberland friends walk as if the Devil were at their heels and motor as if they wanted to overtake a train. I am sorry for them and they are sorry for me. To be brief, I like less exercise than the North is wont to give me, but more than the South, but then I gain this advantage over both, that neither of them have any sporting instincts and I have some—though I am not one of those damnable collectors who go about exterminating every rare bird. Sport is the way to take exercise without feeling it. Even the Surrey woods mean something to me on an autumn morning, when, by their gold-brown trees, the pheasants are pecking on the fallen beech-mast and the rabbits playing in the sun. The eastern counties are the home of partridges and hares but the south and the north give you the rocketing pheasants, whose whir adown the covers is the finest music of an October day. But I have done little shooting in England and still less have I fished. The wretched dace and chub of the muddy southern streams do not attract me and, as for western waters, no fly that I could cast would ever tempt their trout. I know it without trying—they were not made to be easily victimized.

I see that I have just offered one amend to Surrey and, though I do dislike it as a whole, I have to admit, after all, that it has given me many good times. I lived once in a small village a few miles out of Dorking and, bicycling about the Surrey lanes of a summer night, I have stopped to listen to the nightingales saluting the moon from the deep copses. The rapturous and solemn notes broke, with answering chords, upon the shell of the tingling earth, and all my senses vibrated with vague response. The ode of Keats falls, in my opinion, just short of ultimate beauty

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(with the exception of its two most famous lines), because, in the fullness of its language, it leaves too little to the imagination. For me, the song of those woodland nightingales spoke to the sensual ear in a tone without equivalent and the ecstasy of their music was, in itself, the sum of all expression.

In the glossy summer nights the sleeping village gave out the scent of its cottage gardens and the gabled roofs showed dark beneath the stars. Standing once within the unseen shadow I heard two men talking of a companion who had died in the Boer War. "Poor fellow, he will return no more," said one, and both were silent as at the final word. It was not death that seemed tragic at that instant but the thought of the Englishman lying far from home away in the foreign land. It is English soil that should take our English dead and from their bones raise up the cycle of our true English years.

And again, I have other recollections of Surrey that I treasure. Not far from Guildford, where the Char winds through its fields, some friends of mine had bought a cottage and thither I would at times repair from London for a quiet week-end. On burnished summer evenings, when the sun's rays mingled with the smoke of the city, I have felt a particular joy in fleeing into the country from out the exhausted bustle of the town. It was not typical Surrey country at all, but flat and unpretentious, and the suburban element had overlooked it on its Sunday jaunts. At times I have even bicycled there from London, but that was rather to destroy the rounded idleness of the visit. They collected moths, these friends of mine, and of an evening we would catch and set the unfortunate insects. Otherwise we did nothing but sit in the garden or go for singularly uneventful strolls. But their kindness to me and the peace of their little home and the whole air of smooth, becoming rest were good. . . .

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I went to a Public School in Berkshire, but I disliked its setting of heathy sand and pine wood, perhaps because I disliked the life altogether. It is the fashion to run down Public Schools, but for myself, I prefer them as they are now, when they have shed some of their lustre, to what they were in my time, when, to a chorus of praise, they taught you little beyond conventional snobbery. Yet, after all, their snobbery is, in the main, a mere stage in youth's ingenuous progress, and as for their conventionality, are we not all inevitably conventional in the structure of our gregarious state? People talk of this as an unconventional age, but that is nonsense. No age is unconventional. The only thing that happens is that standards shift and values alter. Convention, which was created primarily to keep level the equipoise and fraternity of the tribe, is now so embedded in our make-up as to be as strong as nature. Indeed, it accounts for much that may be called obscure in modern unrest and it lies behind all those percolating ideas that, started by the mysterious impulse towards change and evolution, run through nations like an epidemic and display the unreasoning psychology of crowds—which is, itself, derived from an unconsciously conventional striving towards general agreement.

One day, in the last year of her existence, Queen Victoria came driving over from Windsor to visit her grandson at the school. I have seen various celebrated people, from Diaz to Venizelos, from George Meredith to Joseph Conrad, but never have I seen anyone who gave me so strong an emotion as that tiny bunched-up figure of the Queen. There was the sense of immortality about her, the sense of a living institution, and in her very insignificance and homeliness there appeared something profoundly moving. Then off she drove like the wind, with her fat coachman and her Highlander on the box, and the incredible apparition had faded into the woods.

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Yes, that part of Berkshire I did not like, but a rare visit to the Thames, fifteen miles away, was well worth while. Not even the Cam at Cambridge or the Isis at Oxford, backed though they be by their ancient Colleges, can yield the sensation of robust timelessness that gurgles from the middle reaches of the Thames. One floats upon the stream and eyes the grassy banks that pass and pass and one feels that always it has been so and always will. Then, as a contrast to this unchanging change, appears a rose-bowered inn upon the marge and, landing by its wooden steps, you walk into a garden and eat your strawberries and damp sandwiches of watercress. There is something truly fitting in this river-fare and much, indeed, might be said for the propriety of certain foods in certain places. In fact, a connoisseur of good living, with a palate at once refined and selective, should write a book about the national dishes of England, with philosophic appendices on the relation between places, dishes, and character. I, for one, would willingly subscribe for a copy, such is my earnest desire to know all our national foods and such my appreciation of their several excellencies. I have eaten Cornish cream in Cornwall, Yorkshire parkins in Yorkshire, and Lancashire hot-pot in the County Palatine. How original! I wonder, by the way, what sort of dishes Wiltshire produces? I think they would be first-rate. Of the English counties I have not explored Wiltshire is the one that attracts me most. Its downs call to me more urgently than do the Sussex downs, and I imagine that Savernake must be finer than the New Forest, about which, in my opinion, there is a histrionic touch. Moreover, though I like, in a kind of way, the idea of its splendid seats, Longleat, Bowood, Wilton, and the rest, I like still more those glimpses of humble lives which give to *A Shepherd's Life* so inimitable a charm. How few have dwelt with sympathetic commonsense upon the English peasant types. Men like Bourne,

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and Reynolds and even the poetic Hewlett have the spirit of the social reformer and are incapable of unbiassed realism. The country labourer has, no doubt, been exploited by the farmer, but that is no reason why he should now be victimized by sociological sentimentalists. Things are changing, and things will change still more, but the qualities of the English peasant remain constant—an odd conservatism tarrying in a humorous disillusionment, a stoic fatalism, inherited prejudices, and an animal appetite that is not always worrying over the state of its soul. In a sense, the peasant is nearer to the aristocrat than the middle class will ever be.

There is a type of person who seeks to unbare the secret of medieval England by close scrutiny of her monuments and ruins. I consider it a thorny pursuit and the average archæologist a mere groper after antiquity. It is true that the atmosphere of some ruins —of Fountains Abbey, for instance—breathes out a magnificent calm, but, in general, the spirit has fled and all that remains is decaying art and statistics for a collector's note-book. With Cathedrals it is rather different and one would not deny that in edifices such as Gloucester and Lincoln the passing ages have left their wraith within the walls—I do not feel it in the same degree about York or Canterbury—but as a rule a grander conception of the old is to be obtained from vistas of a crooked, narrow street in a market town than of a ruin whose stones were worn ere ever the Elizabethan timbers were cut. The very old takes on an impersonality which ceases to be impressive, and I often think that a New England village must give you a rarer sense of the past than do the Pyramids.

Modern manufacturing cities (though preserve me from a life in Bristol, Sheffield, or Manchester) and hamlets whose pulse reflects the every change of the slow centuries hold, alike, the true romance of civilization, but the deadest of all dead things is the villadom

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of provincial towns, of watering-places, and of health-resorts. Their hopeless drift of feeble and unmagnanimous gossip and the awful blight of their bourgeois respectability are one of the curses of England and you have only to look at such places to realize the negation of Purgatory. Here is the contrast: Newcastle on a foggy evening when, from the railway-bridge, you see the flares smoking on the water and hear the sirens of the river-traffic going up and down between the lights of the tier'd cities—a little Cotswold village in the July dusk, all fragrant with honeysuckle and dimmed for you through the soft melancholy of Housman's songs—Bournemouth, beloved of old ladies, poodles, and retired Indian Officials, where the dreary Municipal roads lead to dreary Municipal vistas amidst pine woods that seem to carry the stamp of the Town Council on every branch.

And speaking of Bournemouth, I would like to mention another horrible place—Harrogate. But this Yorkshire Spa has been made bearable to me by the fact that my Northumberland friends once migrated near by and that, consequently, I have visited it under the best of mitigating circumstances. It used to form, indeed, but a short morning's walk from their house to Harrogate and back, and I have often done the round in company with their black retriever who, from his dejected and funereal appearance, was commonly and rightly known as "The chief mourner." My friends have two little children, a boy and a girl, and I count them as amongst my staunchest adherents. In fact, the boy once went so far as to inform his mother that he wished I were his daddy because I was "the stupidest man he had ever seen"—an extreme compliment, I may tell you, to my powers of amusement. We used to carry on long and realistic conversations about one Giant Blunderbore and his misdeeds, but though my imagination soared remarkably on these occasions his doubts were never quite put to rest. I

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recall how after one particularly vivid flight of fancy he enquired in an intense whisper, "There isn't *really* a Giant Blunderbore, is there?" "Isn't there, just," I replied meaningly. When I introduced Kent to Northumberland I also introduced the respective sons, both Johns and both aged seven. After eyeing each other for some time they went off to play with paper darts and returned mutually satisfied. This was fortunate, as the small girl, being a born flirt, usually monopolised the attention of any boy, even if it could only be brought about by a free fight with her brother. Already at the age of five her references to Giant Blunderbore appeared those of callous unbelief and she probably disapproved altogether of our long talks. The little chap from Kent, I should mention, is of a thoughtful turn and was, perhaps, not yet impressed by the society of ladies. At an early age he remarked gravely to his father, "Dad, do you think I ought to start my reminiscences now?" . . . But didn't I set out to discuss Harrogate? Well, I think I won't discuss it, after all. Unlike my friends, it deserves to be forgotten, but they will never be forgotten, and I only hope that the whole four of them will never forget me. It is easy enough to have men friends and it is easy enough to rub along with women, but to have a real woman friend postulates in her a sense of humour of a kind that is just about the most unusual of the feminine gifts. I have found such a one.

But, when all is said, who knows anything about women? I have studied them at close quarters for years, from the saint to the ravening megalomaniac, and, having come to no conclusions, I naturally hasten to air my views. Women are often extremists, but in their most candid moments of every variety they never give themselves away—in my opinion, they couldn't if they wished to, because their inmost language is not ours. A cynical judgment on women

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is foolish, not only because cynicism is a cheap way out of difficulties, but because it assumes a similarity that does not exist and ignores qualities that do, but a sentimental judgment is still more foolish because it assumes that women are romantic. They are not—they are only passionate. Romance is the price or the reward of men's idealism, but women are not idealistic and their great unselfishness has often (not always) an egoistic background. If a woman loves you, good and well, but when she ceases to love you she will forget all about you and your kisses in the tenth of a second. Then, if you intrude, from the adored one you will be the odious without a word of warning. Thus comes into play that sex antagonism which is as strong and fundamental as the sex attraction. No one knows, least of all a woman, why passionate love may have so sudden a termination. Like a hunted animal, unable and unwilling to analyse her own emotions, she strikes out with vindictive cruelty and feels neither compassion nor remorse. In the relationship of men and women there is nearly always a slight pose because each has contrived for the other certain very fine and intangible conventions which both are attempting to fulfil. But women, no more than men, are really deceived by such, and both are aware that, beneath the pleasing fictions of the game, neither can live alone. "The secret of all" lurks there in one form or another. The conscious subtlety of women merges into the natural subtlety of sex, and, in my experience, women understand men no further than men understand women. But, whereas a woman assumes that a man will not understand her beyond a definite point and accepts his love on the assumption that he, too, will assume it, nothing upsets her more than to be unable to follow her lover's every thought about herself. Woman, who is inherently full of mental reservations and for whose soul men have agonizingly sought in bodily possession, doubting for ever whether

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it be theirs or no, woman demands all or nothing. Her desire, as the desire of men, is for the mind as well as for the embrace, but, being ungifted with irony and being more concentrated in her desire, she can seldom reach his level of tolerant acceptance and flies quickly to invective as the sign of her bewilderment. . . . But what has all this to do with England apart from the fact that England is full of women; and what is a rule without an exception?

I would like, and yet I would not like, to say something here about one. In the very heart of our unrest, is there, perhaps, a magic word that passeth not away? At times I almost believe there is and that very occasionally there are born those who might, if they would, conquer the very scepticism of change, itself. Criticism hardly touches such a character in its beautiful sincerity, in the gentle ardour of its "still conclusion," and of all the women I have met she alone, of whom I speak, without ever losing a breath of her feminine humanity, attains to the ideal of Shakespearean dignity and tenderness. A worthy close.

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XV

RECOLLECTIONS OF JOHANNESBURG

LIKE every large city Johannesburg seems to grow in size as the complexities of its life emerge from beneath its first vacant stare. The undercurrents become visible with the widening of your acquaintance, and the town no longer shows itself as a mere handful of centre streets but as an amorphous and spreading entity. It is very hard to write coherently about such a place. To those who know it, its name alone conveys the every nuance I should wish to emphasise, and to those who know it not, the most piercing and elaborate study could hardly define its exact significance. I ask, therefore, for some indulgence in my attempt, and I can but hope that, if old residents shrug their shoulders, they will remember that new eyes may see things and new minds judge values, which, long familiar to other eyes and long settled in other minds, may yet appear to the freshcomer as a string of startling pictures and paradoxes rather than as a portion of that everyday existence which is so soon taken for granted by even the most detached observer. And as to those others, ignorant of Johannesburg, whom my words may bewilder rather than enlighten, let them believe me when I assure them that I have difficulties they wot not of. After all, one writes a book like this more or less for oneself, so that, in later years, the past may be recalled and one may feel again that reaction of personalities which is the joy of travel. This must be my real excuse.

By rights, I might well have anything but pleasant memories of Johannesburg, as I underwent there, within the space of about a year, two operations revealing to the surgeon's knife the deep cause of

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prolonged ill-health, but, as a matter of fact, they are extraordinarily happy. One cannot help liking this society of women innocent of the small talk of modern progress but tingling all over with the conscious wiles and warm instincts of their sex, and of men who, though they may never quote poetry in ballrooms or give vent to anarchic ideas, are men and not mouthpieces and, in truth, much more typical of their time than many of the effete products of European cities. Moreover, the whole town is full of animation. The café life of Johannesburg, sign of innumerable flats, throngs the streets not less by night than day, and the groups of stunted and flashy youths, who spend all their time, apparently, arguing at the corners of the pavement, are suggestive of those doubtful activities that spring up in the wake of vast and thriving populations. A walk around Johannesburg allows of no such thing as boredom. Here, in its centre, are the buildings of renown, the new Law Courts and the old Post Office, the Town Hall with its coppery-green roof, and the Rand Club, that seat of chequered history, whose name is as a chapter out of the past and whose members are as hearty and kindly a set of men as you could wish to meet. Here, too, in the midst of Johannesburg is where the ladies do their shopping and meet their admirers for cloistered morning-teas, and here flourish those singular offshoots of our age, the bioscope-cafés, where for the price of a sandwich you may watch a cinema performance repeating itself throughout twelve solid hours. I am, myself, inclined to prefer bioscopes to theatres, the expectedness of the crisis and the simplicity of the psychology being restful and just sufficiently stimulating to the brain to allow you to dream in silence within the dream of the silent play, but to haunt them constantly as do some of these caramel-eating young women is as insidious a vice as drug-taking and more dangerous in its respectability. . . . A continual procession of tram-cars,

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coming from the uttermost parts of the earth, pours its stream of reinforcements upon the overcrowded pavements of Eloff and Pritchard Street and in the middle of the day they present a sight of huddled humanity it would be difficult to match. But move a little from the perimeter and new scenes, quainter and quieter, follow one upon another in the pageant of this cosmopolitan city. Outlandish names blaze upon the shops of the meaner streets and the scum of eastern Europe seems to have frothed up again in Africa and to be leading here anew that furtive existence which it has led elsewhere for centuries. On certain holidays you might imagine yourself in a Semitic town, and true it is that the Jews share with the English the local dominance to the virtual exclusion of the Dutch. Indeed, were it not for the police, who always appear to have been just drafted in from the country and to be quite ignorant of the topography of their own beats, and for the dwellers in one or two of the poorer suburbs, the Dutch in Johannesburg would be conspicuously absent. The manual labour of the place, the work of its streets and houses, is performed by natives, Basutos, Zulus, and Swazis, in the main, whilst the army of mine boys, whose life is hidden from you in reef and compound, are recruited mostly from Portuguese territory. I visited one of those compounds when the boys were below and watched the preparation of the dinner. Great cauldrons of beans, porridge, and meat were steaming and simmering in the flagged kitchen, and in the bakehouse an elderly Scot was mixing the ingredients of the Kaffir bread—an excellent bread when fresh and composed, as to eighty per cent., of mealie meal and, as to twenty per cent., of flour, the whole being bound together and tinctured by molasses. . . . So spins the daily life of Johannesburg. It is only the pedestrian, lounging through its streets from week to week, who can form any idea of even its superficial variety and of that spirit

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of anxious gain which calls into the affairs of its existence every energy of man's incalculable and freakish soul.

In each stratum of Johannesburg society there is to be found an expensive restlessness, with a tendency to accept all things as permissible. The morals of the town have often been unfavourably commented upon, but the truth is that the morals of all large towns are much the same and that the difference lies not so much in what is done as the spirit in which it is done. Things are taken for granted in Johannesburg that might be looked at askance in Peebles. Is it the instability of the life that gives the younger generation here its insatiable appetite for pleasure or is it some breath of the veld freedom, which, caught in the corruption of the streets, reaches the city with a soiled message? But, indeed, the question is not alone of sex or of age. Everyone will tell you that business morality is also at a low ebb. I sometimes fancy that its causes are to seek in a polyglot population whose only common interest is money. Tradition has more to do with the conduct of commerce—I will not say of finance, for finance is international—than people imagine. In Africa, unlike Europe, each man begins, so to speak, afresh, and, having no ties behind him, feels fewer scruples ahead. This, no doubt, is a broad statement and capable of much refutation.

The Jew is usually blamed for the business laxity of Johannesburg and the whole country, but it is one of those points which admit of wide discussion. It lies outside my scope, though the Jew, himself, as a phenomenon of Johannesburg, is very much within it. The outsider, with natural intuition, regards all Jews as belonging to one large family, whose might is founded on the fact that its religion is its nationality, and although, individually, one discriminates to every degree, yet, collectively, one sees them as an indivisible force. The Jews in this city bring to the supreme

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object of their lives open and acute minds and the secret of their success is to be discovered in their lack of prejudice. They have, as a race, an almost hereditary imagination for money-making, and a friend of mine tells me that, happening recently to walk down a street behind three little Israelites of about five, he heard one remark earnestly to his companions, "You know, it's quite cheap at £4 10s." How can one expect to combat such a people in their own field!

Your social aspirant in Johannesburg gravitates naturally towards Parktown or the houses along Houghton Ridge. I cannot say that I consider Parktown quite worthy of the honour. The gaudy newness of this suburb, where each dwelling has an acre of ground for the owner and where several ought to have a gallows for the architect, with all its affectation of planted trees and jumbled tameness, strikes me, on the whole, as being rather more depressing than the dowdiness of a decaying street. I don't deny that on a fine day, when its gardens are blooming and its white houses gleam behind its hedges of Australian haccia, Parktown is a very pleasant place. Certainly it is. All I say is that there is a kind of rawness about it which floats dismally to the surface in spite of any enchantment. The Houghton Ridge, on the other hand, is a real joy. Its rocky gardens, cut out of the sheer hillside, give on to a wide northward view and the light and shade of the day pass beneath you in the trail of the diaphanous ether. Below the ridge lie the Zoological Gardens, into whose warm hollow the breath of the upper wood floats delicately with the odour of pine trees. The collection of animals cannot compare with that in Pretoria, but the Gardens are roomier, and on a Sunday evening, when the band plays and the crowds are scattered down the paths, the sight is picturesque. In another direction, again, lies the Country Club, whose grounds are, perhaps, the one unalloyed treasure of Johannesburg. Originally a

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farm, it has long since changed its character, and with its old trees and sloping lawns, with its flaming cannas, its willow'd lake and gentle stream, it shuts out the bleakness of the waste in the illusion of an English home. Society much frequents the Country Club during week-ends, and in the dances given here from time to time opportunities for moonlight confidences are not wanting. More definitely "accepted" than the Automobile Club, it yet brings people together that Parktown would probably separate and may be considered, therefore, as an experiment in sociology with points to recommend it. But, in any case, it recommends itself, and that is quite enough for me.

But if you would really witness Johannesburg society in its phases then I would counsel a visit to Turffontein on a race-day or to the Carlton on a Friday night when they hold their cabarets. They are, in a sense, democratic institutions, these two, but though the classes mingle on the course and on the floor they do not mix. Horse-racing I have never cared for, but dancing is a form of energy which, even in its present guise, stirs the demoniac possession of a very ancient desire. Thank heaven, it's one of those unreasoning powerful emotions that can be enjoyed without any need of analysis! And, you know, the Colonial girls dance divinely. They take their waltzes, one-steps, and fox-trots with the slow, deep movements of an inner rhythm. And what a lot of pretty women, and not only pretty but delightful, you will see in any Johannesburg ballroom! The fever of life, part product of a 6,000-foot atmosphere and part of a social system founded upon the rise and fall of shares, beats here as nowhere else in South Africa, and there is a constant resolve to get out of existence all that existence has to offer. Indeed, in its cosmopolitanism and its attitude, rather than in its mere size, this town, which but thirty years ago was

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represented by a few miserable shanties, is entitled to rank as the only city of the Union, with everything that the word city connotes. It is an achievement that we owe to gold and gold alone. The precious metal is the backbone and brain of the community. It has tinged its life, it has coloured its ideas, and now, to the younger generation, to whom it seems no more than a settled industry with which they have little direct concern, it acts as the unconscious moulder of their being.

I remember when I first came to Johannesburg a friend escorted me to the top of the Corner House, that high building of high finance, and showed me all its wealth in the sweep of the gold-reef marked throughout its length by the immense dumps of white and powdered rock. A notable sight in its way, and all the more notable in that, were the full figures divulged, it would appear rather as a witness to the magic name of gold than to the wisdom of speculators. The roots of greed are sometimes embedded in romance, and I have felt, myself, a breath of the prospector's fervour in sight of the pure metal. It was on the occasion when I was conducted over one of the mines and after seeing the elaborated skill of the working, the huge pile of spares and stores, the mechanism of a marvellous technical industry employing in this mine alone nearly 20,000 people, after whizzing 3,000 vertical feet into the earth at forty miles an hour and beholding down there another city, as it were, toiling men, electric trains, pumping-engines, signs of tireless energy and foresight, after seeing all this, I say, was shown the whole results in a few yellow bars worth £4,000 apiece. (And that was before the days of a premium!) Yes, then I understood the fatal history of gold. They were not beautiful, those bars, they were not even my own—but they were gold, gold won hardly, painfully, in tiny driblets from out the reluctant rock. They were,

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in short, the beginning and the end of many men's desire.

The mines of the West Rand, the Central Rand, and the Near East Rand are now mostly petering out or of poor value, but the Far East Rand is proving the Indian summer of the capitalist. I have motored out along it even to the borders of Heidelberg, where the developed mines give place to the veld and a few prospectors' huts set the limit to civilization, and the thirty-six miles of the journey were enough to prove to me the exactitude of the saying that gold is always found in the dreariest portions of the universe. These colossal mounds of tailings, in weight up to 3,000,000 tons apiece, remain, and will remain for ever, bleached and glaring in the sun. Experiments in grass-growing have been tried upon them but the cyanide kills all vegetable life and when the wind blows strong the dust flies and the air is thickened. Yet, repulsive howsoever the road be by day, by night the barbaric splendour of the great power-houses and the glowing mine-plants lifts all into the region of poetry and the flying car speeds back towards Johannesburg through the whir and glitter of a Pluto's realm. I suggest that only the talismanic name of gold could have created such a wonder in so few years out of the void and hopeless veld. The stamps cease not their crushing night or day and there are parts of Johannesburg where you can hear them, as you lie abed, like a tide beating evenly and powerfully upon a distant shore. Sometimes, too, you will be roused from sleep by earth-tremors from falls within a disused shaft. Very startling they are and realistically akin to a true volcanic shock. I am surprised that no predikant has announced a theory as to their warning origin; that those who live by gold shall perish by gold. It would not be so bizarre.

But I will speak no more of the mines, which are a subject, rather, for technical experts or philosophic

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pessimists. I hear that someone or other is writing a history of Johannesburg and I hope he will unravel the story of the Finance Houses (those painfully secretive institutions) and explain the true reason of their existence. The beginnings of the history of this town, when everyone speculated and extravagantly cunning Jews consolidated the foundations of their monstrous wealth, when avarice took on a political complexion under the shadow of the quarrel between Rhodes and Kruger, when nothing was as it really seemed, all that would make a quite absorbing document. I met once in a Turkish Bath here an old masseur of over sixty who had lived in Johannesburg half his life and who had not attempted a deal in shares for nearly thirty years. Think of the intrigues, the plots and counter-plots, that had risen and died away around him as he went his innocent path unspotted by the world! He reminded me of the recluse who lived through the Terror in Paris unaware of the Revolution, or of the elderly provincial lady who, coming up to London to spend her final years, used to attend Bradlaugh's services at South Place to the day of her death under the belief that she was in the midst of a conventional nonconformist congregation. . . . The book I should like to see written about Johannesburg presumably never will be written. And you will find no forerunner to it, I fear, mentioned in the valuable (though incomplete) *South African Bibliography* of Mendelssohn. Meanwhile, the most amusing account of these early days of which I have cognisance is the one contained in my eldest brother's *Shadow Show*, a picture of our globe, which embraces the seven seas in its sweep and is as full of vivid colour as of vigorous opinions. . . . I wonder—now that I am on the subject—whether this essay of mine, which amounts to hardly more than a suggestion of headings, will lead anyone to expand my thesis? Every great city should have the historian of its moods as well as of its facts. . . .

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Although the Johannesburg station is meagre as architecture and the worst possible advertisement of the town, yet it contains a restaurant which serves the best dinners to be had and is, in consequence, a nightly witness to a good deal of quiet and discreet entertaining. In the pleasant task of waiting there for a lady one is able to form an idea of the traffic radiating from Johannesburg over South Africa. One evening as I was watching a mail train steam out, with passengers leaning from every window, stewards lined up in the saloon, and its whole air of luxury and civilization, there suddenly came to me a vision of it wandering, lit-up and mysterious, over the wastes of Africa. Each day the spreading lines carry out of each city in Africa, from the coast to the Congo, the scheming hordes of mankind in their voyages over half a continent. In the making of nations and the conquest of the wilderness there is no more thrilling chapter than that of railway development, and if one could only tackle it what a subject is here to hand! . . . And, ah, these exhilarating African dawns aboard the train! The brown-green veld swells and glistens towards the horizon, farmhouses dot the landscape like the scanty sentry-boxes of an advanced guard, hawks hover above the feeding cattle and the occasional ox-wagon winding across the plain. The repetition of such scenes throughout the slow hours of a drawn-out day makes of monotony itself an impressive attribute of nature. But, here, in the city, that spirit is not and what I miss above all is the wayward bird-life of the veld. Even the short forty-mile run 'twixt Johannesburg and Pretoria will remind you of it, in the proper season, by a sight of many herons and of those black and yellow finches called sakaboolas, whose long tails, fluttering ridiculously behind, give them a queer resemblance to little swimming snakes. But Johannesburg, itself, is poorer than most cities as a hunting-ground for the ornithologist, though the

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larger gardens have their birds, especially when the fruit is ripening, and though I have actually seen near the Country Club a flock of white egrets strutting boldly about the feet of the cattle. In botany, too, it is poor, though during March you may find the graceful cosmos in its outer lanes. . . . But I was awaiting a guest, I remember, and now I observe her approaching over the bridge only twenty-seven minutes late. I must book a table. . . .

At the top of Hospital Hill, just below the Government Laboratory for Medical Research, the builders have left an open space from which you may obtain an unmatched view of central Johannesburg. When the smudge of night has fallen and the electric lamps are awake upon the town there is presented to you a spectacle of loveliest unreality. Gone is every sordid outline and gone are the very thoughts of the day. I used to walk thither from my nursing-home, near by, leaning on the arm of any charming lady who had called to beguile my loneliness. Together we would stand and look, whilst, in the stillness of the gathered dark, not a word would pass our lips and only the fancies of the hour would be alive about us. Nor, thinking now of these dear companions, am I going to believe that such moments can ever utterly be lost in the forgetfulness of the future. This kind of responsive silence is, indeed, very attractive in women, the one real compliment possible at the beginning of friendship, and it is the sadder, therefore, to mark how many have overlooked the key that may unlock all. If only they knew as much about men as they think they know how different life would be!

In the welter of its crowded existence Johannesburg used to give me a warning of the European fret. Lying in my room, on the fourth floor of the Rand Club, as I was wont to do of an afternoon during convalescence, I would hear the murmur of the streets like a mutter of the coming anarchy and madness of the world.

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Nature, I assume, never intended humanity to have a brain capable of such expansion and unrest. Her wish was for strong men and comely women, fit continuers of the species, with just enough intellect to fave them from the material perils of existence. Nothing can be more certain than that our mental capacity has increased out of all proportion to our bodily excellence. The brain, like some impotent Frankenstein, is turning upon its creator and, as it writhes in its growth within its wretched tenement, is filling the body with nervous toxins that react upon its own sanity. We are nearing the vortex of a whirlpool. Internationalism goes hand in hand with its very opposite, an inflamed nationalism; and in our morbid self-consciousness we now, as someone has put it, spend so much time talking of our rights that we have forgotten about our duties. Every era is the victim of its own catchwords, its loves and its hates, "Liberty," "Reaction," and none more so than this—the capacity for believing what you want to believe is ineradicable—but if the universe is to be saved it will be by a return to other ideas that can also be expressed by words—to the ideas of honour and fidelity. I notice increasingly that all really able, sound, and interesting people have much that is fundamentally simple in their character. Intellectual subtlety and the kind of personal attraction which "counts" are rarely, if ever, combined with that basis of futile complexity and arrogance which makes the egoist a burden to himself or herself and to everybody else. Self-centred cleverness is a feeble gift at best and about those people who base their lives on its exercise it need only be remarked that there is something wrong and diseased. . . .

It is one of the drawbacks of such a book as this that personalities can be but touched upon in a very flavourless and intermittent form, a safeguard which shuts out, inevitably, a whole intimate side of things and

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must give to these pages a sterility which is not theirs by due. But the unwritten law of social intercourse closes the innumerable details of existence and the unwearied study of actual people in a few sentences, and I, certainly, am not going to outrage this proper convention. Unlike the present generation, I believe in the older conventions, because I happen to believe in some sort of social cohesion, and yet, if ever I were tempted to lift the veil, it would be in regard to this African city. Here abide the personalities that would fill folios and found fortunes, and here, as perhaps elsewhere, you will find that one man in fifty who is suddenly recondite and "ungetatable" like a character in Stendhal. Yet yours is the final reward in the absolute, the secret, the never-spoken judgments which, in the course of observation, you form of the men and women you come in contact with and form with an astonishing and unflattering accuracy.

Yes, especially as it is now no more to me than a recollection. The longest and the happiest experiences come to an end and life consists only in the giving up of one thing, even to itself, for the gaining of another. Johannesburg, which already before my departure had begun to assume for me that new aspect of a place you are about to leave, perhaps for ever, that aspect as of something receding and insubstantial, is now but a niche in the past. It isn't nice to think of, but then there are so many things that aren't. I like to imagine in such moments of depression that life, itself, and all that we know as nature may only be a morbid growth upon the peace and silence of a world "sleeping untroubled since the beginning of ages." I do. It casts a film of sham callousness upon the mind.

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XVI

ACROSS THE ISTHMUS AND DOWN TO CALLAO

THE Isthmus of Panama, as I knew it, has ceased to exist and blue water now joins ocean to ocean over the railway track that linked Colon to Panama when the Canal was but a spear-head thrust out from either end and the jungle was in full possession of its heritage. I am writing of old times, you perceive. The very day I landed in Colon the Americans had concluded their negotiations with France, but there was no canal-zone as yet, no Panama Republic, and—no drainage. I hear that Colon is now a busy town; in my day it was a mud-heap. I won't attempt to describe it, but, in two words, it was the sort of place O. Henry might have chosen as the setting for some of his Central American yarns in *Cabbages and Kings*.

We landed in the morning and, as the train to Panama did not leave till about three o'clock, had time to drive out to the promontory where de Lesseps and his engineers had their houses and where the statue of Columbus fronts the envious sea. It was a good drive, reconciling one to the baseness of Colon, but it did not prevent us boarding the train long before it was due to start. The line, I remember, cut through the main street, and to the clang of the engine's warning bell we steamed out of the town by houses built on piles sunk into the morass, and so presently into a forest whose dense undergrowth but half-concealed the quivering slime and glittering fever-pools. No wonder the workmen died like flies while, from the unsprayed stagnant water, mosquitoes were allowed to issue forth in millions to leave their mark

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upon the land in the shape of endless white crosses by the edge of the railway. It must have been a task to keep that line free from the wilderness, which literally gaped upon it with steaming breath. I stood upon the observation-balcony of the rear car and could hear its soundless jaws snap behind us as we passed, could see its festoon-orchids fringing the forest where ten yards from the track you would be lost without a compass. The French failed, but they left weals upon the landscape which not even the jungle could obliterate. In the change of the country we saw the broadened Chagres flow beneath us with dredges still at work, we saw the slash of the unfinished Culebra Cut and, most tragic of all, we saw machinery, rows of engines, cranes, and excavation tools, wallowing and rusting in the long grass of sidings and disused depôts. Sometimes we would glide into a little village and the train would be besieged by negroes, Indians, and Chinese ready to sell us ginger-ale, tickets for the state lottery, fig-bananas, and cakes of weird design. Then on we would press and the bush would close upon us again and the receding track would shimmer behind us. Such was the three hours' journey from Colon to Panama—that journey no one can ever take again.

As soon as we reached Panama we drove to the Grand Hôtel Central, which lies upon a spit of land, with the sea on either flank and the strangely-decorated old Cathedral rising opposite, across the square, through a mass of flowering trees. A minor revolution was then in progress—one hundred and thirty people had been killed in the station the previous week—and nobody was allowed out after ten p.m. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to spend the evening in the bar, where we found a fierce and moustached individual presiding over a roulette table and where a companion of mine, to the extreme astonishment of everyone present (including the owner of the machine), won five dollars at a game of mechanical poker. But in more

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senses than one it appeared safer not to hazard a chance like that too often and so, still keeping on excellent terms with the moustache, we retired to bed.

In the morning I made several anomalous discoveries, one of which was that Panama, of all places, produced a daily paper in Spanish, French, and English; another that, though there was an electric tramway in the streets, there were also deep holes which seemed to arouse no indignation; and yet another that, though politics were debated from dawn till dusk, human life, itself (the object of politics, I believe), was of no account at all. Panama was a death-trap. Its inhabitants shouted about liberty in the morning, died from fever in the afternoon, and were buried in the evening together with the victims of their revolutionary ardour. The sea of that fair bay has no cleansing properties and the sun which shines so brilliantly above serves but to raise the dread miasmas of the night.

But if man did not disregard death how could he live? I had a lesson in this the day after my arrival. I had gone out for a desultory wander about the streets and after a time drifted into a little deserted Public Garden and sat down on a bench. I had not been there above a quarter of an hour when an unprepossessing man of about forty-five, tall, meagre, and down at heel, came sauntering up the path and seated himself beside me.

"Been here long?" he enquired all at once, removing the cigar-stump from his mouth and favouring me with a stare.

"About a day."

"Well, if you survive three weeks you may survive thirty years."

The tone appeared to me morbid.

"But what are the chances of surviving three weeks?" I asked anxiously.

"Quite poor. Why, there are seven deadly fevers

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raging in Panama . . . And black vomit isn't the worst of them," he added with gloomy satisfaction.

I thanked him for his information but he was not elated. "Don't thank me—I'm just telling you," he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

His manner was hardly forthcoming and for several minutes we remained silent, gazing at our boots. About us lay the violent sunlight of the Tropics.

"Why don't they drain the blamed place?" I cried suddenly in an irritable voice. He was getting on my nerves.

The stranger didn't seem to think it worth an answer. He got up with an air of weary indifference.

"Look out for things that burrow under your toe-nails," he remarked abstractedly. And with that he was off down the path, the shuffle of his feet sounding loud enough in the great stillness.

You may imagine that I sat on there in no very cheerful mood, and yet I may as well tell you at once that I did not even use a mosquito-net during my two nights in Panama—at least, I fancy I did not—and felt no ill-consequences whatsoever. Of course, if I had stayed three weeks . . .

Of the town itself I retain no very distinct impression. Old Spanish Churches abounded in the steep and narrow streets and through the doors of the houses, flung open to the stifling air, Chinamen could be seen sewing and Colombians lolling in the midday heat. Groups of soldiers lounged aimlessly at corners, the officers actually in uniforms, the youthful privates in rags, with rifles slung behind their backs, and their heads surmounted by wide-brimmed, peaked straw hats. Descending a lane to the left of my hotel the bay broke dazzlingly before me, studded with its wooded Pearl Islands and beautiful to the eyes in a liquid glow of colour. Red houses streamed like a banner along its curving edge and at my feet the water gurgled lovingly upon the pebbled shore. The way this opens

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to one from out the sordid town is something to be remembered with delight. Pestilence seemed to die upon that coast and smiling life to call one to those green isles. Deception never made a more seductive gesture.

News reached us at last that our steamer was in the port and we went down to the wharf and boarded her. She was a Chilian boat, one of a line that plied between Valparaiso and San Francisco, and I have not known a more comfortable voyage. Give me again these eleven o'clock breakfasts with the hot corn-cobs, the maple syrup, and the boiled eggs mixed in the glass tumblers, and save me from the terrible experience of eating a raw red chilli in two mouthfuls! By Jove, I have forgotten neither the one nor the other! Beyond a bored Anglo-American who seemed to have a personal animosity against South America, we were the only English passengers. The sea was calm, the heat tempered by the vast, soft breeze of the Pacific, and on the second day out, behold, there swam beside us the black and yellow striped water-snakes of the Ecuadorian coast. On the next day we drew inshore and lay to off the island of Puná, which guards the mouth of the river-estuary leading up to Guayaquil. A doctor came on board, examined our tongues, and announced everything correct. Nowadays, it is more essential to have such rites performed when you leave Guayaquil, which appears to be in a perpetual state of quarantine owing to yellow fever. But I am telling you things as they happened. . . . We proceeded up the narrowing stream, on whose banks the virgin forest undulated its topmost boughs above a wall of leaves, and at four anchored in front of Guayaquil itself.

The town has a river frontage of some two miles and the houses of stone or whitewashed split-bamboo gave back the glare of the sun in a blinding flash. A great activity was visible upon the river; steamers plying to and fro, launches hooting, Indian market-boats from

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the interior drifting with the tide. There was a general inclination to conduct the traffic by shouting; but I presume they knew their own business. We went on shore. The sloth of the afternoon was just ending and a certain bustle of men and donkeys began to wake about us. A mule tramline wound through the level streets and the tinkle of its bell came muffled to us in that torpid air. There are some passable buildings in Guayaquil—a city of 50,000 inhabitants, who, squat and sturdy in appearance, bear upon their countenances strong marks of their Indian blood—and self-conscious Ecuadorians could be seen issuing from them as from the heart of civilization. But they are not really a very civilized race, and though possibly one degree better than the Colombians (on the principle that the further south you go in South America the more stable the population), yet it is nothing to attract attention. Moreover, they are fanatics of the fanatics. I have not been in Quito, that cloud-city of the Andes, but my brother has, and from his description of its Churches and cowering worshippers I live again, as it were, in the pages of Lea's books on the Inquisition in the Spanish Colonies. What future have countries like Colombia and Ecuador? Are their revolutions a stereotyped form of everlasting conservatism or will they at length produce a real Liberator? Is there anything worth liberating, by the way? Avoiding the second question from motives of delicacy, I think, perhaps, I had better avoid the first also. Intelligent knowledge of South American problems and peoples is not common. It is true that for some years past there has been a craze for writing books on these various Republics, but they read, mostly, like statistical puffs by optimistic (and interested) Governments. I don't suppose many of them are, but that is the impression they give. The best general survey is, I take it, Bryce's *South America*, which in spite of its ambassadorial tone is, at least

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readable and full of mature discrimination. But I am getting outside of my province.

After we had had our fill of wandering we returned to the quay, only to find ourselves in the midst of the queerest market you can imagine. Indian canoes lay cheek to jowl along the front, nosing the shore like a row of minnows nosing the stonework of an artificial pond. In the sterns the family dinners were cooking and children howled, in the bows were heaped-up piles of fruit and native produce. The market spread along the quay, where panama hats, fancy bread, parrots, and fish vigorously fanned by old crones lay open for your choice. Fruit was everywhere, exotic, enticing, with the pungent and over-ripe smell of the Tropics—pineapples, guavas, paw-paws, water-melons, sugar-apples, coconuts, mangoes, and the most delicious of green oranges, all pulp and juice and quite absurdly cheap. For a small silver coin I acquired half a sackful, which I carried with me on board: before I could finish them they had begun to go bad. No stay-at-home will ever taste the Guayaquil oranges!

The sun was setting now and two ribbons of cloud fluttered in the western sky. The tide had turned upon the river, which reflected momentarily the changes of the fading light. Four times daily in the ebb and flow of the sea the current shifts upon that swift, brown stream, bearing up and down a mass of leafy islets and broken stems, a mass covering the surface of the water as with the green raiment of a forest, to disappear inland or seaward for an hour or two and to sweep back with unfailing regularity. Rather a wonderful sight.

Next morning we were early on shore and, ordering breakfast against our return, hired a carriage and drove out into the country. The roads were primitive, but the sight of the little hills beyond, covered with their yellow scrub, urged us on. By-and-bye we reached some sort of a country resort, perhaps a beer-garden,

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where games and swimming were in progress, and there we tarried for a while. But it was not what we came out to see and, downcast and disillusioned, we returned to the city through a parade of red-coated firemen and by suburbs where even whitewash was dispensed with and rubbish-heaps ornamented every shack. In the listlessness of the town, where few ventured from their patios and even the market was closed, one could catch the husky whisper of the "line" itself. You can't live in Guayaquil without discovering what heat really is, and, waking from an afternoon sleep there, I have found my body in a literal bath of perspiration. It is a good place to see—it is a good place to get out of.

Going down stream we missed the tide and were held up for several hours this side the bar. And suddenly there leapt forth, far beyond the splendid foreground of the woods, above the topmost clouds, in the very blue of the heaven, the white and radiant summit of Chimborazo. Like some miracle of the sky, a sign watched long ago of shepherds portending a new era and a sacred birth, it hung there over the prostrate world. And day by day as we sailed down the coast the shifting line of the Andes followed us, emerging in the clearness of morn, icy, immaculate, inconceivably pinnacled in the heights. At times the evaporation-mist would conceal the mountains from our eyes, but the coast, itself, was ever visible. A barren coast it is, treeless and scarred with sandy rocks. I recall, particularly, a place called Payta, a desert-town without a blade of grass, lying beneath brown-yellow cliffs whose drifting sand powders all its streets. Payta is just as impossible now as Anson found it in 1741. They informed me that no rain had fallen for either seven or seventy years—I forget which, and it seems much the same, anyhow. The town exists on the export of sugar and is linked to the interior by a railway. The rafts in its harbour are the resting-place of all manner of sea-birds (pelicans, in particular) that

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evince little fear of man, and its streets are full of dogs that evince none at all. As to the number of these dogs, Damascus, itself, is scarcely a rival. They belong, for the most part, to a hairless Mexican breed, but poodles and fox-terriers also abound, and the why and wherefore of them is too much for me altogether. Like lazy ragamuffins they sprawl about the streets and, barking idly at you as you pass, pursue you with a perpetual fusillade of growls. I was glad of their company. As any reader of this work may have observed, I have a fondness for dogs. They amuse me, and though it has been objected to them that they are mere slavish sycophants on mankind, I prefer to think that they have logically come to the conclusion that man has more brains than other animals and is therefore better worth cultivating. Well, they obtain their guerdon.

I have not told you as yet that we had on board one of the great men of the world in the shape of a Peruvian ex-Dictator, who, in spite (or because) of a bloody exit some years previously, was now returning to the bosom of his country in a regular debauch of speeches and sentimentalism. He was a respectable-looking old gentleman, not unlike a family butler, with grey side-whiskers, gold pince-nez, and a dignified carriage, and he was accompanied by a very charming lady and several secretaries. I bring him into prominence here because it was at Payta, our first Peruvian port of call, that the chief functions began. A deputation came on board, eloquence and champagne flowed in the saloon, and everyone appeared highly gratified. Somewhat similar proceedings were enacted the following afternoon at Salaverry, where three enormous boat-loads of patriots, accompanied by a band, set up a chorus of "*Viva*" as the General emerged. Whether the news of the champagne had preceded our arrival I cannot say, but certain it is that those who managed to scrape on deck had the mortification of drinking the

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hero's health in nothing stronger than beer. Meanwhile the last state of the patriots in the boats was worse than the first: the Pacific ground-swell, that frets eternally those shores, claimed one victim after another. No enthusiasm can resist sea-sickness, and if our steamer had stayed much longer the popularity of the General would have melted away with painful suddenness. . . .

We were drawing near to Callao at last. Mounting on deck before breakfast I espied to starboard the scattered guano-islands where ships were loading and men toiled at their unsavoury work. And on our left the mainland stretched into the distance, topped as ever by the dazzling peaks. On the morrow we anchored in the roadstead of Callao and our eight days of pleasant voyaging were over. In this harbour, full of shipping and tumult, there is an air of reality one misses in the more northern ports. Callao, itself, is given over to business, a modern, material sort of place, calling for no particular comment and very untypical of Peru in general. When we landed it was in a state of martial intoxication over its returned wanderer and we were able to move unnoticed through its paved and crowded streets. So were we lost to that seaboard for a time.

But if you go on a journey, peradventure you return; and after certain weeks this hope was fulfilled and we were again in Callao. But not alone this time. Accompanied to the coast by a band of new-found brothers, we made a triumphal exit from Peru. There is a nice little English Club in Callao, overlooking the sea, and there we made our fraternal and thirsty farewells. I felt anything but happy as I waved good-bye to the Republic. Sailing out of that harbour was like turning one's back on a beautiful and half-mysterious woman. But what could I do? . . . We had hardly settled down when the captain—he was not a South American—discovered in himself an urgent

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desire to play poker and began to beat up the more promising passengers. I was one of them, as also was the Chilian Minister to Mexico, and one way and another he gathered an adequate party. I enjoy poker, but that captain had a zeal for the game that was rather exhausting. In fact, I was never able to discover when he found time to navigate his ship. From morn till late at night we sat in his cabin. The coast slipped by unseen, the hours vanished, and in the fascination of the "draw" one almost forgot the unbridled rolling of the boat. It was an uneventful game and only interrupted when one player threw the cards out of the window in a fit of irritation. But another pack was soon produced and everything smoothed over. I began by winning but ended a loser. The captain on bidding me farewell at Panama observed confidentially, "I always reckon to make £30 on this trip." Fortunate man!

If the game proved uneventful so did the voyage. We carried a number of cattle and pigs and at each port would sling some of them over into lighters with our donkey-engine crane, the cattle by their horns, the pigs upside down by their feet, three at a time, and bumping wildly against one another. The cattle remained silent, their eyes starting out of their heads, the pigs set up a hideous and prolonged squealing. The whole thing was vilely cruel and has now been abolished—probably because it did the animals harm. There is little else to mention. The men in red had not saved Guayaquil from fire and a goodly portion of it lay in ashes: as for Panama, no one had saved it from anything. It wasn't to be expected.

We did not stop there but caught the first train across the Isthmus. It was night when we reached Colon and, making for the ship out of that hell-on-earth, civilization burst upon us in the shape of a Royal Mail steamer alongside the quay in which white-uniformed officers were dining with ladies under the

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awning of her stern-deck. This lit-up scene, coming on us like that out of the gloom of the fetid night, was a picture not only dramatic in itself but symbolic, somehow, of a far horizon. England had stretched out her hand to us across the sea.

It transpired that we were not to sail that evening and, being filled with the spirit of adventure, we resolved to improve the occasion. Thus it happened that our party of three sallied forth after dinner to seek out a Chinese gambling-saloon in the purlieus of the town. "Bring every cent you have," was the order, and though we had comparatively few we determined to hazard them all at a blow. Collecting from our pockets a motley of the silver coinage of half the Republics we staked them and—won. Two of us were for retiring modestly with our doubled capital, but the general-in-chief would have none of it. Apparently there were to be no half-measures. "Put it all on again," he commanded. You can picture the scene—the dim room with the Chinamen eyeing us across the table, the other gamblers drawn back to gaze at the mad gringos, and the sort of pause in the air that is the usual accompaniment to all such fantastic occurrences. We did put it on again and for the second time we won. "Let's get out of this," I muttered, and my more timid friend agreed with a look. "Once more," snapped our leader firmly. He gathered the money in his two hands, planked it on, the wheel spun round, and a sigh went up—we had lost. With twopence left between us we returned, crest-fallen, to the ship. A gold goblet from out an Inca tomb, a set of unused stamps, and a Colombian paper dollar were our only solid mementos of South America. But, of course, some people have not even brought themselves away from such a visit, so I must not complain. An appeal to the better emotions of the Purser produced, on credit, a ticket for the one of us who had not even this, and we then awaited calmly the

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hour of departure. I prefer the memory of our gambling to the memory of that hour. As the big steamer swung her head round and faced the angry cross-current of the bay she gave a convincing and unexpected heave. I was sitting aft watching the foamy half-circle of our wake and I just managed to reach my cabin in time. For thirty hours Colon passed as completely out of my mind as it passed, at that moment, out of my sight.

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XVII

MEDITERRANEAN SHORES

AT the age of twenty-five I made a tour in the central Mediterranean with a shipload of people collected out of every corner of England, and it is this tour which I now propose to describe. I shall not keep exactly to the order of our progress nor shall I depict our life on board. I am thinking of places rather than of persons and, though I have spent many engrossing hours in deck-chairs (especially after dinner), yet this is hardly the spot to linger over memories which, as far as that steamer was concerned, scarcely exist. Other steamers—ah, yes! But that is begging the question. I must stick to facts and the facts of this journey were deplorably prosaic. No one loved, no one quarrelled, and though one father of a family did fight with his hat in the middle of the night, mistaking it for a ghost, no one even drank to excess. We tolerated one another and in the end parted without regret. Perhaps it is the ideal state.

See us, then, landed in Tunis after a pitching run across the Mediterranean. Our woes were already forgotten and we scattered into the town like school-children on a treat. And like school-children we felt a sudden freedom in our new surroundings. I did, at any rate. Vague and fascinating are my Tunis recollections and in the multitude of their half-images I seem to grasp again the orbèd whole. I remember the broad French streets with soldiers marching to and fro, the Roman aqueduct, the Palace of the Bey with its grandiose red carpet, and, above all, I remember the native quarter with its little stalls and staid men stalking in the burnous and flowing

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white robes of Moorish Mohammedans. The followers of the Prophet regarded us with disdainful unconcern, the old hags dozed over their heaps of fruit and coloured seed. And beneath the trees sat certain intellectuals in Europeanized dress and with pasty faces who drank Turkish coffee and whispered apart. To my simple intelligence their exotic appearance invested them with an immense prestige. It is odd, this feeling one has about foreigners. One wavers between treating them as infants and as beings of supernatural wisdom—an evidence of our island origin, I suppose. These unhealthy young men were probably the equivalent of bank-clerks, but I gazed at them with awe. Of course. They were so particularly unlike anything I had ever seen. As for them, they did not cast a glance in our direction and we might have been so much dirt. It is a painful thought, but then a traveller is always at a disadvantage because he invariably looks a fool and generally feels one. And I felt more than usually foolish that day. It is bad enough to be alone in strange scenes, but to be with a party not of your own choosing—hum! It is not that I have a sense of superiority. There would be no reason for it, and I haven't, thank the Lord. But there is something about a crowd of tourists lowering to the natural dignity of mankind. Besides, to make matters worse, we had a cicerone with us whose instructive remarks resembled the more moving passages of a cheap booklet. An awful person!

I have to own with shame that we lunched amidst the ruins of Carthage, which are but a short drive without the town. Yes, we desecrated them with the most consummate vulgarity. Our historic sense slumbered beneath bottled beer and sandwiches and we recked not of the past. But, indeed, there is little to be seen, and of that little nine-tenths are the ruins of the city Rome built upon the original site. Carthage, itself, has vanished. Hannibal, Hamilcar, Hasdrubal,

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sound mythical names in the airy nothingness of their abode. These heaps and broken stones convey naught to one but a sad disgust. It is a grievous spectacle and after the flaming pages of *Salammbo*, flaming though they be with colour rather than with vitality, one can only sink into a reverie and be still. If ever there was a wizard, that wizard was Flaubert.

Such reflections, I admit, caused me no inconvenience at the time and, apart from a natural disappointment, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. If Carthage exhaled no atmosphere, Tunis did. I don't think I have ever been in a town fuller of the precious and indescribable essence. In that mingling of East and West there is, as it were, something exquisitely apposite. Nothing jars and in the fanning of the summer breeze an air of lightness seems to float over the city. My impressions may be as erroneous as they were untried, but it appeared to me that the French, in their good-sense, have not hardened Tunis with officialism. I hope I am right, for I can only think of Tunis as a kind of modern fairy-land—a thought which may make me smile one day when I revisit it, a thought which may even keep me from revisiting it.

And the plain surrounding Tunis is attractive because it fits in so quaintly with the scheme of one's imagination. In this April weather the sun shines warm upon the green fields. A train is puffing over the flats and Arab figures are dotted upon the dusty roads. The spirit of the East dwells by this western sea, but it is the spirit of crops and not the arid, sandy spirit one associates with Mohammedan countries. Yet the desert is not far off. A string of camels has just halted in the market-place and their eyes shine wickedly as, with working jaws, they kneel to the harsh cries of their drivers. This traffic emerges from the horizon and is swallowed into it again with silent regularity—the sea is not more reticent than the

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Sahara and exacts not a more arduous service. But I do not wish to think now of those wastes but only of the fertile belt that runs along North Africa from Tunis to Algiers. It is a veritable land of romance, a land where the earth brings forth abundantly and where peace is to be found in the heart of grapes and corn.

Night came and with it the summons to return. We straggled down to the wharf, boarded the launch—or were they not boats towed by a tug?—and in the darkness steamed down the canal to the open sea. Oh, ripe experience, with the water lapping round, the smell of the salt spray in the air, and the lamps of the roadstead fading behind us like flares upon the tide!

We put in at Malta, which remains chiefly in my memory as a white dazzle. Never have I seen such blinding, unwinking light. The streets of Valetta are narrow and abrupt and bear resemblance to those of many an Italian town. Moreover, they are full of earnest shopkeepers and the path of the extravagant is made easy. This did I find to my subsequent regret. But what can one do in Malta save buy lace? Certainly you should go up to the old fortifications, solid as the hills, above the harbour and, looking downwards, see the warships resting beneath, formidable and stark, but Malta, itself, is a singularly unprepossessing island and appears to be almost devoid of trees. Of course, my coachman may have led me astray—the Maltese do not love the English—so I shall not dogmatize. But from what I saw of it I should prefer a drive in the interior of the Isle of Wight, which is a banal experience, to one in this far-famed Island of the Knights. Imagination can hardly thrive upon nothing and, unless it be the Cathedral which has truly the merit of twilight, what is there for it here? Taken all in all, I hope never to look upon its like again. How do the Maltese stand the summer heat and why don't they

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all get ophthalmia or the trachoma of the Egyptians? These are questions I should like to ask a doctor. . . .

We went on to Girgenti in southern Sicily to view the remains of the Greek Temples. It was curious to observe what an hypnotic influence the name of Greece has upon people to whom ruins in general are a kind of incomprehensible nuisance. They stared upon them with beating hearts, they walked round them, and, with conscientious lips, they read aloud full descriptions from a book. It seemed to me that they were inspired by a genuine but temporary stimulus. For though these ruins are notably beautiful, yet they are but dilapidated fragments, after all, and their position upon the hillside is not impressive. The rough and tumble of the walk thither may have had something to do with the allurement—a halting-place is welcome to weary limbs and a sense of conquest is very dear. (Climbers know that and so even do writers.) But, personally, I regarded these Temples without knowledge or much pleasure, and I had better leave the description of them to more enthusiastic pens.

Sailing from Girgenti, we skirted Sicily and, round Cape Passaro, made the eastern harbour of Catania. It *is* a hole! The quays are covered with blocks of sulphur and the town is dismal beyond expression. After seeking vainly for amusement in the Municipal Gardens, where, by the way, nothing is to be found but flies and parched throats, I drifted into a library full of old theological books bound in vellum—a preposterous collection. What an extraordinary breed of men these Catholic commentators were, the successors of the Fathers, laborious, learnèd, futile, and doomed to the most utter oblivion! Their works clog up the southern libraries as seaweed clogs the basins of the tide-swept pools. . . . I returned to the steamer in time to sleep off the effect of too much dust.

Most of my companions had spent a more profitable day in journeying round Etna and their graphic

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accounts held out hopes to me that our united excursion of the morrow would not be wasted. We were to go to Taormina, that aim of all Sicilian travellers. And go we did. At an early hour we were marshalled into the train and after winding along the shore for some ten miles we alighted at a small station and entered, one by one, a long queue of waiting carriages. In thiswise did we toil up the road to Taormina. High above the sea it stands, a little back from the bluff, and its streets are sacred with the footprints of half the artists and littérateurs of Europe. Like to like. In front of the village, upon the very edge of the deep, deep cliffs, are embedded the fine remains of a Roman amphitheatre. The prospect from this coign rouses guide-books to a perfect frenzy of ardour and, indeed, it is one of the show views of the Mediterranean. The sea slumbers beneath and Etna smokes beyond the rising hills. The majesty of this vista lies in the calm greatness of its proportions and in the swelling changes of its landscape. But I did not enjoy it as I should have and actually felt somewhat depressed. I don't like these European beauty spots; there is too much of the overblown rose about them. Nor am I alone in that sentiment. I remember that as I stood there trying hard to feel enthralled I descried one of our party reclining upon the grass, his head propped upon a mossy stone, his bowler hat shading his eyes. It was a comfortable rather than a graceful attitude, and as I approached he greeted me with the following just remark, "I could do with this place all right for an hour if I had a pipe and a ha'penny paper." I have thought warmly of him ever since. But he was not one of our most shining lights. Oh, dear no! We had some very genteel people on board, to say nothing of a man who had once been mistaken for King Edward VII. They have gone the way of most faces in my memory, but two brothers there were whom I do still vividly recall. They were large, splendid-looking men, with

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exalted foreheads and the manners of princes. Even to one another they never spoke but with old-world courtesy, and it was wonderful to see either hanging on the words of his brother in an ecstasy of good feeling. They each had £5,000 a year, did nothing, had nothing to say, and spoke constantly with fluent urbanity. I don't think an unkind thought ever entered their heads, but then I am not sure that any thought ever entered their heads. They were the soul of generosity, always wanting to pay everything for everyone, yet, though they had no glimmering of humour, they seemed to be shielded from the world by a sort of innate stateliness. Surely they were the English cousins of Ivan Durak, the wise fool.

But I was discussing the overrated beauties of Taormina. . . . Of course, it is a paradise compared to Catania, but it is what I call a Cook's paradise. It has all the things that it ought to have and it leaves one cold, just as some people, who have all the correct views, bore one to distraction. But the amphitheatre, itself, is a delectable haven, with its sunny nooks and the wild up-borne air of the sea. I remained in it for an hour or two and then wended my steps to Taormina and partook of food in a garden. It was, perhaps, the most agreeable part of the day, especially as we came in for the excitement of an attempted murder. The Sicilians are a hot-tempered race and make a free use of knives when irritated. But they are picturesque, and though their horses are scarecrows they adorn them with red and tufted harness: a string of carts going to market is like a circus procession. Poor Sicilians! I pardon them their avariciousness because of their gaiety, but I'm thankful that I wasn't one of the wounded in the Messina earthquake.

Yes, that was a bad affair, but no earthquake was on the horizon when, some few days later, we sailed through the Messina Straits in starry dusk and saw

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the lights of the town twinkling at us across the water. The repose of centuries could not have seemed fuller or more free from warning. Yet, when next I ventured thither, destruction had fallen. *Sic transit* . . . We were making for Palermo, a city of size and distinction, of which I should like to know more. It has personality, an unusual thing in Sicily, and its personality appeared to me rather delightful. But how can I write of what I hardly saw? A friend and I took a carriage and drove to Mon Reale, stopping at that monastery without the town whose soil has the unusual quality of drying up the flesh and preserving it from corruption. In the vaults they showed us first a vast number of skulls heaped along shelves, then layers of coffins containing desiccated monks, then, finally, for our complete gratification, the body of a Garibaldino in uniform, which, having rested a year in the ground, was now like to outlast the ages of mankind. It was a creepy entertainment and we were glad enough to return to fresh air, but I should have been sorry to miss it. One has to see what one can.

Mon Reale, however, soon put all thoughts of the musty dead out of our minds. It lies at the summit of the long slope above Palermo, and thence you look downwards towards the city through mile after mile of orange groves. An idyllic and soothing panorama. But we sternly averted our glances from it until we had visited the Church, which contains a black Christ and much elaborate mosaic work. This duty performed, we retired to the balcony of a cafè raised above the highway, and there in ample view of the gold-green orchards we sat in prolonged content.

And so my last sight of Sicily was far superior to my first. But it is not an island I desire to see again. For me, as I have remarked, it lacks personality in the main. And personality is no less the savour of places than of persons. It is the one thing needful. No, Sicily does not appeal to me. It gives me the idea of

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being overpopulated and parochial, and, though its scenery be grand, the grandness is, let us say, too expected. If I wrong it through ignorance (which is more than likely), may I be forgiven. . . .

Descending upon Italy, we landed in boats upon the shores of the wild maramma where rear themselves, in solitude, the two Greek Temples of Pæstum. Few ruins have so struck my imagination. Their position and their preservation give them a sublimity, a dumb eloquence, far beyond anything at Girgenti. I do believe that no one could look upon them unmoved. The pillars are deep-honeycombed by time and weeds grow at the very portals, but the glory of Greece hovers over these buildings. The grace and beauty of the ancients have enshrined themselves for ever in the desolation of the waste. What made them choose such a site? Had they that eye for contrast which appears so significant to our senses or was it a religious or utilitarian reason? Vain questions and thrice vain he who would ponder upon the obscurity of motives when the clear results stand lustrous before him. We had to walk some miles along the shore to reach the Temples and on our return twilight overtook us, the sun sank glittering along the pools, and the frogs began to croak. It was a memorable expedition.

Leaving that night, we arrived duly in the Bay of Naples. I have seen it since, I have entered it in cold and rain, but in my mind it will ever have one immortal aspect, the aspect in which I saw it then for the first time in the limpid mildness of a spring morn. In blue and silvery tones the great city, with Vesuvius towering above, basked along the margin of the bay in the still warmth of the budding year. But I need not attempt to describe what is known to half the travellers of the world. And even if I did attempt it I should fail. *Vedi Napoli e poi muori:* the verdict is given that, at the apex of wonder, there is no more need for words than for life. Thus, the Italians. But

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I permit myself to doubt whether a certain local pride has not vitiated their judgment. To say the least, Valparaiso and Sydney may be more entrancing sights, and though Naples be fair as a Queen yet surely she pales before the decaying loveliness of Venice. But comparisons are odious, and as I gazed then upon her face I saw only the burning beauty of it without alloy.

My cabin companion and I had overslept ourselves and when we emerged on deck it was to discover that everyone had departed for Pompeii. We made haste to follow them and our signals promptly brought a boat alongside. But be it known that Neapolitan boatmen are all scoundrels and that only guile can outwit their greed. This useful and accurate piece of information came in very handy and I now donate it to humanity at large. As we were nearing the shore we both, at a given word, jumped like grasshoppers, or should I say flying-fish, on to dry land and so avoided extortion of an argumentative sojourn in the middle of the bay. Freed thus from their clutches—for such I assure you would have been our fate—I turned and threw back the exact fare into the boat. Phew, but what a hubbub arose! Talk of baffled tigers! Threats, curses, and wailings rent the air. Nor did it end in words. Leaping on shore, these shameless boatmen got one on each side of us and, calling on the name of justice, announced their intention of hailing us straight to the police-station. On our politely remarking that that was precisely where we were going ourselves they vanished forthwith, and we continued alone our austere and upright progress towards a pastry-cook's shop.

Yes, we thought we would eat first and travel afterwards. You can get excellent food in Naples if you know your way about, but I remember on one occasion having a lunch quite spoilt there by the sight of an Italian gourmet tearing a small octopus limb from limb while the perspiration poured down his face. Is

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it so irresistibly tasty as all that, or is it merely a Latin trait?—for so did I once see a Frenchman, a fat fellow with a sandy moustache, dispose of a lobster on the island of Sark. An offensive and unbecoming exhibition. On the other hand, the Neapolitans are marvellous manipulators of macaroni, spaghetti, and all those farinaceous strips, and can perform quite as remarkable feats with them as could old Father William with an eel.

This morning, however, we were not hungry and indulged only in a few cakes before making for the funicular railway. Pompeii, as everyone knows, lies up the mountain-side, of which the volcano of Vesuvius is the further spur, and from the train glimpses of sea and hill open wide and fair. Not that Vesuvius, itself, is particularly august but that with its curling smoke it dominates the bay and all the nearer coast. No, Vesuvius taken alone would be of small account. Of the three volcanoes of this region it is the least imposing. Etna is more peerless in every sense and Stromboli, rising conical from the surge, a far more startling phenomenon. But situation and historic awfulness have given Vesuvius fame and the years only seem to add to it. To me, its grassy banks, its soft outline under the Italian sky, spoke more of peace than of terror, but to the inhabitants of Naples a warning note still echoes down the centuries. And voyagers, gazing at its peak, hear, so to say, the echo of that echo, and rejoice fearfully. Vesuvius is a mesmerist.

At the entrance to the ruined city a guide presented himself and proceeded to unfold the mysteries of the past. Strange and melancholy it was to stroll through these disentombed and silent streets, through these streets where the sudden fear was yet apparent, but stranger still to see where the excavators were at work and where the removed lava-crust was revealing a civilization hid for nigh two thousand years. How often, as a boy, had I devoured Lytton's romance

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and how utterly did I forget all about it as I trod in the very steps of Glaucus and Arbaces! The tale may be exciting, but the reality is too absorbing for fiction—for Lytton's fiction, at least. . . . We fell in with some girls off the ship and continued our explorations in their company. They added liveliness but they brought embarrassment, for our guide suddenly announced that if the ladies would kindly go forward he would show the gentlemen something that only gentlemen could see. These Italian guides don't mince matters and are quite oblivious to hints. I frowned, changing the conversation in a loud voice, but he only reiterated his statement and we had to follow him. Still, as I said once before, one wouldn't like to miss anything. The truth is, Pompeii is full of things "which only gentlemen can see," and you would be well advised to go there alone. My second Neapolitan hint!

[ ]Pompeii's finest works of art are preserved, very properly, in the Museum at Naples. I did not visit it because I spent most of my time on the quays examining shell-necklaces and wondering what proportion of the lolling frequenters belonged to the Mafia. Was a desire for political liberty the real origin of this blackmailing society (as is asserted) or would it have come into being under the most enlightened rule? It would require a student of southern Italian character to give an answer to that, but I can guess what the answer would be. As I say, I did not visit the Naples Museum and, with my usual perverseness, I do not specially regret it. What I do regret is that I never even visited the Aquarium. It is the foremost of all deep-sea aquariums (those things fascinating beyond words), and it is just such an aquarium that is our chief lack in the Zoological Gardens at Regent's Park. Well, I had the chance of seeing the one in Naples and I let it slip through my fingers. Idiot! . . .

We went across the bay to Sorrento, a delicious and

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languid spot where you could dream away your life in forgetfulness. At that time I was unacquainted with the *Siren Land* of Norman Douglas, a book full of learning and of great charm, and was ignorant of the superstitions, and largely ignorant of the history, that gird the coast round Naples. But now I should like to go again to Sorrento and Capri and wander in earnest upon their steep-to shores. Capri in particular seems to have had a singular attraction for mankind from the reign of Tiberius till to-day. But all I know of it is the Blue Grotto, which, I gather, is the usual extent of a globe-trotter's knowledge. Never mind—the Blue Grotto is worth a visit. It was a calm day with the merest, gentlest heave upon the Mediterranean, as, lying flat in the gliding boat, I entered it through a crevice in the rocks. Its water, deep and clear, has the colour of a translucent sky and the limbs of the diving youth glow like a light-hued and monster sapphire beneath you. A pretty effect—pretty enough to be commonplace, some would say. But I don't agree, and if I did, what does it matter? The chorus of the exclamatory praise of a million visitors might have formed an everlasting echo round its walls, but why should I, then, not enjoy the obvious? I am one of these people, now at length beginning to raise their diminished heads, who do not believe that minorities are necessarily wiser than majorities, or new ideas better than old. True, I did not appreciate Taormina, but I never argued that minorities were necessarily worse than majorities. Oh no, I am not to be caught so easily! All I ask for is my own opinion.

The sunlight filtered into the Grotto and through the opening the sea flashed merrily. There could be heard without a lapping and gurgling upon the stones. Passing from this Aladdin's Cave, we rested for a moment on our oars as we drifted slowly, bobbing to the short ripples of the beach. Before us the steamer lay as dead upon the water and her wisp of smoke

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alone stained the cloudless quiet of the afternoon. A string of boats crawled between the Grotto and the steamer and, pulling into line, we found ourselves presently under her black lee-side. I must say, and it is an ignominious avowal, that the throng of beaming faces above, the faces of people I had lived with in harmony for several weeks, gave me, at that instant, an unpleasant shock. Was it that the return to reality is always painful or was it that, though I love the average, I detest the crowd? I cannot say and, indeed, it signified little: for my time with them was over and our course was set for home that very hour. We were bound for Marseilles, and thither we arrived on a Monday morning, having steamed westwards with a following sea between the inhospitable shores of Corsica and Sardinia. So closed this little round of tame adventure.

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XVIII

AUTUMN HOURS UPON THE SCOTTISH BORDER

SOMEWHERE, put carefully away in a drawer and unseen by me for many a day, there lies the autobiography of my first dozen years. That lengthy document contains the story of a boy's life in the most romantic of countries, the Scottish Border, and it is in the hope of catching again the spirit of my boyhood that I write these few pages. Like the countless tentacles of a forest, the faint and gigantic impressions of the past sigh about me and from their dream-like luxuriance I choose out some autumn hours at random. The years of my adolescence float back to me in many things, in the odour of the flowering currant, in the tinkle of bells borne through the hazy evening air, but chiefly, perhaps, in the scents and sounds of the crisp, yellowing months. One day, I think, I shall enlarge my autobiography into a voluminous book covering twenty years, but till then I must let this fragment serve as a reminder of all that was and as a token of those ringed and magic hours.

After all, I am a Scot of the Border and it beats in my pulse, and there must always be my home though I were never to see it more. It has its own special voice for me, the natural, clear voice of home, the familiar, welcoming voice, so touching and so dear to every exile. Words cannot capture its fullest echo; it is bound up with the emotional dumbness of boyhood, with the period when the forming character is plastic to impressions that fix themselves indelibly within one. Out of the luminous twilight of the years my earliest memories unroll themselves in crowded eagerness and I

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experience again that special mystery of the earth which is given to each child anew. The feel of youth does not leave one's memory, it is the world, itself, that seems to change, to dwindle, to lose its freshness. If one cannot live permanently in the scenes of youth it is wiser not to revisit them at all. In the one case old age overtakes you with no destroying touch, in the other the past is enshrined in you as an ever-living present over whose moments you can browse in armoured silence.

The counties of my boyhood were the four counties of Roxburghshire, Dumfriesshire, Selkirkshire, and Berwickshire, and each of them stands forth before me in the bedewed and shining apparel of its special lustre. From the top of the Eildon Hills, near Melrose, the place of my birth spread into its green and wooded distances, rimmed eastwards by the North Sea and merging afar into names of high renown. Thither would we clamber of a Sunday afternoon in a search for blaeberries and staghorn moss and white heather in their seasons and with an ever-wakeful eye for the fox that might leap up before us and be off with his bushy tail over the brow of the hill. The steep ascent from the Bowden Moor brought one to a spring of icy water on the slope. Many a time have I drunk of it and, raising my head, seen the woods below, as in a tingling spell, with the first shades of autumn breaking the long monotony of green that held yet the shimmer of the noon.

In the October mornings we would go brambling amongst the thickets at the foot of the quarry or by that burn which, pouring out of the forest into a marshy field, starred in summer with meadowsweet, orchis, ragged robbin, and shaky grass, meandered on its course through banks where the tangled bushes grew and met and where the spiders' webs glistened with hoar-frost above the moulder of decaying vegetation. Gathering brambles is as exciting, in its way, as picking

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mushrooms. The ripe, black berries conceal themselves in the depths of the thicket just as the whitest mushrooms lurk often within a cup of grass. How silently one would make a discovery—were there not others near by to reap the reward of your good fortune?—and how little one cared for scratches when the under-branches revealed a laden treasure! To mushroom properly you must be up at dawn and across the fields in the wet dew, but for brambling the ideal hour is after breakfast while yet the sun hesitates and the frosty nip brings to you, in the still lanes, the very essence of the ripened year.

The autumn afternoons draw in all too soon in Scotland. Before tea we used frequently to go for a walk, picking up as we went the acorns and oak-galls that plopped down with the leaves along the edge of the russet woods. Our feet crackled upon the dry sticks and, peeping cautiously over the field, we would see the rabbits feeding by their burrows on the earthy bank and, further out, the kyloes and Cheviot sheep munching in the veiled and peaceful twilight. Chestnut trees dotted the expanse and the rooks were cawing overhead as they sailed warily homewards. That was the hour when the half-wild cats would be lapping their milk in the stable-yard and a row of chaffinches preening themselves on the pigstye wall. And presently the enfolding night would send all nature to its sleep, all nature save the owls that hooted and screeched in the upper woods, and would find us in our own schoolroom engaged upon the task of making toffee.

When the spate had subsided and the burns had lost their mud and were low once more we would try to guddle the trout that hid under the flat stones. Softly one groped until one touched a slippery body, carefully one's hand closed upon the gills, and suddenly, flick, he would have shot between your fingers and down would whirl a derisive leaf upon your head. Or,

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again, we would dig an immense quantity of worms, put them overnight in a bottle full of moss, and go perch-fishing in Cauldshields Loch. Our catches were insignificant, but the glamour of such days rested in the thrilling sense of adventure. A pine wood overlooked the opposite shore, and the sombre desolation of the loch, with its legend of immeasurable depth and its brooding quiet beneath the autumn sun, threw upon us the dominion of its own atmosphere. But in glancing back over childhood one realizes how skilfully a special atmosphere for every place and recurrent event is created by a child. Think how one used to live in the books one read! And consider this: On the cold November mornings it was my custom to wander out with a catapult before breakfast to shoot at the starlings that chattered in the beech trees at the bottom of the garden. The very feeling of numbness in my fingers was actually part of the atmosphere and I can recall as plainly as possible the kind of four-cornered completeness of that daily half-hour. Nor would I have foregone our Sunday evening strolls along the borders of the plantation when the Sunday calm encircled all and a peace as of uttermost fulfilment seemed to herald the long winter sleep. The tints of the further wood blended and burnt before the colours of the west and the old gardener could be seen standing by his lodge, hat in hand, as though engaged in prayer.

Yes, I much preferred my Sunday evenings to my Sunday mornings, when, in set procession, we would all start out for Church. The stream of non-established Presbyterians and of Episcopalians passed us at right-angles as we drew near the House of God and we would glance at them more in sorrow than in anger. The curious memory stirs in me of a couple of strangers plodding up the hill, and of how, looking at them then, I thought, "All my life through I shall remember these two people and keep asking myself where they are now." I was about eight on that occasion, but all

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my life I *have* remembered them and *have* asked myself from time to time where they are now. Their faces have long since faded but I can see their decent bent backs at this instant receding from me for ever like a sort of symbol of the individual unimportance and enigma of the species. . . . In those days sermons were still wearisomely divided under "Heads" and every innovation was hotly resented. When new ideas triumphed to the extent of chanting "Amen" at the finish of hymns the older members of the congregation retorted by sitting down in scandalized haste. The extempore prayers were punctuated by prolonged pauses, in which the minister wrestled for words, and they used to cause me agonies of sympathetic discomfort, as I always imagined that this time he really had reached the end of his resources. Life was full of seriousness. . . .

I was sent to a private school at Moffat, in Dumfriesshire, and though I have not been there since I left it in 1897 the map of the surrounding miles is in my head to this day. Where the three waters meet and the lonely hills slant to the banks of the Annan I spent the four most critical years of a boy's life. It is a country of moorland and untilled wastes, with pastures beneath and with burns foaming out of purple hills where the autumnal bracken, with its dried and splitting stems, stretches in brown masses all through the upper valleys of the watershed. Often did we picnic by one of those pools within the moor, formed suddenly out of the rocky beds of the streams and haunted by water-ousels and half-pound trout, and often did we stand upon the bridge at Beattock Junction and watch the Caledonian expresses race down the summit and onwards to Carlisle. The masters used to take us walks and we found that a little cajolery would usually turn their steps in the right direction until two out of the three fell in love and began shamefully to exploit our pedestrianism. I wonder whether they

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ever discovered how quickly we unmasked their designs and with what cynicism we entered into their schemes? But why should we not have dissembled when they were, themselves, teaching us the game? The amusing thing is that they both did marry the girls we had, from the first, foretold they would. The headmaster, on the other hand, was feared and trusted by every boy in the school. With his courtly gravity and his manner of half-revealing himself by asking half-ironical questions he had impressed his personality so completely that he was believed by all to be one of "The Seventy Wise Men of England"—whoever they were! I think he had a knowledge of the boyish outlook not often found in the Olympian infallibility of schoolmasters. The dogmas of school-life accept everything save eccentricity, and the headmaster of a rival establishment, who terminated a lecture on good behaviour by announcing that "The true gentleman is known by his tiepin," aroused slighter ridicule by this remark than by his own mode of dressing. Wisdom is certainly less simple than youth imagines, but youth is certainly less simple than middle-age imagines. Small boys are like dogs: it is easy to deceive them—once. My old schoolmaster and friend of to-day never deceived them at all. . . . But school-life, even the traditionless life of a preparatory school, is an endless theme and I will halt on the threshold.

A road of desolate grandeur carried one from Moffat to Selkirk, which was but seven miles from my home, by the waterfall of the Grey Mare's Tail, by St. Mary's Loch, and by the Vale of Yarrow. I have twice made this journey on the coach that conveyed one, in less than a day, through the stern, sweet silence of the hills. You climbed abruptly out of Moffat and off to the left, leaving Hartfell and the Devil's Beef Tub behind, skirting, at last, the shores of the sleeping loch, and winding down that valley beloved of the poets. As noble a drive as any to be

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found in Highland fastnesses! From the quaint town of Selkirk, with its recollections of song, philosophy, and travel, one gazes, as it were, into the eye of the wilderness. Several excursions have I made adown the birch-lined Yarrow with nothing but the croon of water to break the hush of the September afternoon, where the breath of the mellowing days hung with its rosy weight upon the hills, upon the woods, upon life itself. These hours and scenes remain extraordinarily powerful in my after-memory and I could never forget them. And in another tune, who could forget the Selkirk bannocks of one's youth? Nowhere has the art of making cakes and scones been carried to such perfection as on the Border. This statement, believe me, does not arise from local pride but from a pretty broad experience. Indeed, the Border cooking has, in general, the concrete and comfortable individuality of the Border people: it is not dull and it is not experimental; it has come to stay. . . .

My father owned a small property in Berwickshire and we would go there every year, at the very end of our holidays, for a few days' shooting. The Border Keep had been partially restored, serving as a nucleus to the farm-buildings, and from the dwelling-house of stone, with its box-beds let into the wall and its stuffed birds upon the mantelpiece, you could hear the sparrows quarrelling in the ivy'd tower. Eighteen miles we had to drive to this estate, past the villages of Earleston and Westruther and over roads that twisted into the Lammermuirs. It was a spot removed from any railway, removed even from a public road, and its few hundred acres of woodland and rough grass were surrounded by heather. The harvests ripen late on these bleak uplands and at the close of September the one field of wheat would still be lying in stooks. Our plan was to rise before the dawn and, walking stealthily to our appointed stations, build shelters amongst them and wait there for the

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grouse and blackcock to fly in from the moors. The cramped position and the sheer cold kept one on the alert, and suddenly the birds would be all around us like shadowy and silent ghosts. Reports rang out, a hurried flutter of wings rushed overhead, and we would jump up as one and shout to each other across the field. Then we would collect our spoil or tell all that we had nearly done and trudge homewards for our breakfast of oatcakes and ham and eggs, while the delicious autumn morn was struggling through its mists and the promise of warmth expanded over the soaking grass. We used to divide the farm into beats sufficient to last out the visit and with zeal we would devote each minute that we could to sport. We knew the likeliest haunt of every covey of partridges, every pheasant, every cowering hare. And over all those acres there hovered the poetry of possession, the ingrained love of one's own soil, the voice of the Border whispering to our Border blood. Standing at the end of a wood we heard the beaters crunching and shouting in the distance and in joyful suspense and optimism we awaited a regular deluge of wings and scurrying feet. And though, of course, nothing ever came up to expectation, it was astonishing how large and varied the bags were and have remained to this day.

I was there again this last October after many years —these are the latest paragraphs of my book—and I found it just as it had always been. Lying out under a grey stone dyke on the fringe of the moors I saw the autumn woods flaring beneath me and the one dark patch of pine at the foot of the stubble field standing out like a green oasis in the broad expanse of an umber landscape fading westward beyond the boundaries of Berwickshire. A stillness, broken only by the sudden chatter of flocks of little birds undulating over the stubble, rested upon that radiant expanse and it was as if there would be no real sound or change any more in the whole world. And then, suddenly, the

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moor-voices began to make themselves heard, near at hand and away out in the heather, and in ones and twos and half-a-dozens the shy birds were skimming into the field. The blackgame would sometimes perch first on the wall—woe to them!—but the grouse would shoot in like arrows, alighting with a curious little dove-like flutter. Crouching down, with my gun between my knees, the years that had gone were all wiped away. And on the morrow, when in the blind, cold twilight we had taken up the same positions, presently yet another, and a rarer, voice came stealing to us from afar. It was the honk of wild geese flying from the sea, and in that quiet morn it sounded to us as a faint, sweet music of the air. Louder it grew until it was above us and the birds were circling down into the middle of the field, ceasing their cries at the instant of settling, and standing motionless, with every head erect and every sense on the alert. And watching them then and as they flew off in their clamorous phalanx, swaying rhythmically against the swell of the moor, I thought how in the remote parts of the earth I had always been told to go just another twenty miles if I would really get to the heart of nature, and yet how, in this field of stubble thrust up beyond all other cultivation into the hills, I had put my finger upon the very central pulse of our island solitudes.

Long ago we used to be accompanied on our shoots by my father's steward, a man with a sarcastic smile who spoke seldom and to the point and who drank in secret. His wife was a "character," a short woman of abnormal stoutness, whose racy conversation and sad eyes are vividly before me now. She called any English guest a "foreigner," and she would dismiss his chaff with the exclamation, "He's a muckle fule." Her mind was patriarchal but shrewd, and our daily chats with her were a recognized part of those visits in which every second had its ordained significance.

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When the sun had set and our supper was done we used to wander out into the dusk to hear the game calling from wood and field and moor. Leaning upon a wall, with the lamps of the farm shining beneath us and the glooming moors expanding on all sides, we heard the pheasants crowing in the spinneys, the partridges cheeping as the scattered coveys sought one another, and the grouse in the far heather challenging the sky with their "Come back, come back, come back." And gradually, as we listened, drowsiness would steal over those wild hearts, the callings would lessen and die out, and slumber, itself, fill up the gap of darkness. Do you know that quiet of the September nights on the Border, when the Pleiades hang low in the east and the winds are stilled? It is the most wonderful, rich quiet in the world, the quiet of a land where all appears fixed to eternity and where man and nature are as in full accord. Around us the poppy of the conqueror dropped sleep upon the earth, filled our eyes with it, sent us hastening home to lay our heads upon the pillow in swift unconsciousness.

Those days of yore are doubly dear to me in the memory of that younger brother and constant companion who was killed in the German offensive of 1918. His was a nature of singular sweetness not untinged by an hereditary tendency to introspection and despondency. He never repeated gossip and seldom spoke ill of others, but his tolerance was as unlike the tolerance of the average clubman, which is merely a form of laxity and a desire for comfort, as can be imagined. He had his own ideas about life and he worked towards them with an unobtrusive loyalty. He let others go their way as he went his, but he was silently oppressed by the inequalities and injustices of life. Simple, playful, and affectionate, full of fond remembrances and loving to recall every detail and secret family-word of our boyhood, his heart, in the maturity of his considerable powers and at the age of

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thirty-two, was yet even as the heart of a little child. *Frater ave atque vale!* . . .

Here, then, have I given thumb-nail sketches from four Scottish counties in the autumn of the year. But it is not my intention to differentiate actually 'twixt one place and another along the Border. The romance of the marches is over all, the romance of legend and history, a romance brimming into every name and clan, close-knit, the product of a race of individualists and of a tract whose savagery and varied Lowland beauty is indivisible and unique. One writer, above all, sits crowned upon the Border. The natural genius of Scott assimilated its whole atmosphere with the air he breathed, and after a hundred years his finest Border stories are still, in all their artlessness, as true and fresh as the Border winds. *The Bride of Lammermoor* is not passionate as some of Burns' lyrics are passionate, it is romantic—as the Border, itself, is romantic. Burns, with Heine, is the great love poet of Europe in his abandon of tender gaiety underlain with grief, but the Border does not call for such a man to interpret her mature and woven charm. No, she calls for a man like Scott, and she has not called in vain. My grandfather was his friend and I know his house at Abbotsford, I know his favourite drive by the hill of Bemersyde, I know his tomb amidst the ruins of Tweed-washed Dryburgh. My home, in fact, is situated in what the guide-books summarily designate "The Scott Country."

For its romanticism, so obvious and yet so subtle, the Border has had to pay its price in the pseudo-historic outpourings of a host of sentimentalists. The melted sugar of their productions lies with its sweet stickiness upon our famous counties and turns the Lowlands into a sort of trap for touring Americans. (Even so charming a book as the *Highways and Byways on the Border* of the brothers Lang is not free of this defect.) Sentiment and sentimentality glide readily

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into one another in our Border scribes, and I can only say that sound works of reference, such as my own cousin's book upon the Roman Camp at Newstead or Jeffrey's four volumes on Roxburghshire, are worth all their musings. I do not appreciate that idea of romance which is the gilding and distortion of history in a setting of vague inaccuracy. Freebooting is dead upon the Border (save in the industrial sense), and Puritanism, like the true Border dialect, is dying, and, just as it would be silly to attempt any artificial revival of them, so is it silly to pretend that their spirit was other than it was.

And what of the Border folk? With due humility I would say this. The Scots in Scotland are the men, of all others, one would choose to live amongst, loyal, discreet, normal, real in the best sense of the word, but out of Scotland they develop too readily a tendency towards rhetorical declamation about their own country. It's not impressive, it's only childish. Burns' "Nichts" and St. Andrew's "Dinners" are often, in effect, a mere excuse for ridiculous and maudlin exhibitions. Is it, perhaps, that the average settler from Scotland hails from the prosperous centre of the land, from somewhere in that stretch between Forth and Clyde, that stretch which on the Border and in the Highlands is hardly considered Scotland at all? I don't know; but I am sick of being asked how I can be a Scot when I don't talk with "a Scotch accent." You might as well enquire how anyone can be a Londoner who doesn't talk like a Cockney. The keen business Scot, making his way wherever he goes, is often a good fellow but seldom appears to me a real Scot. (But is it, perchance, I who am not?) He is more like a caricature of Scottish caution, acumen, and national feeling. Yet the patriotism of such men, though it may be blatant, is faithful unto death; how many have proved it, alas! Of course, in your own country you don't have to hold up your head and

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shout; but, at any rate, the Border is too self-contained for that.

The Border has its faults but they are different. It is rather pretentious about social claims, rather self-complacent in its ignoring of the times, rather hypocritical in its lip-service to conventions, which its strong passions and intelligence make it deny in secret. And yet these things don't amount to much when leavened by the sanity and manliness of the Border. The bonds of race may keep a nation in universal ignorance of its own psychology, but if its core be sound its very faults may be inherent in its qualities. And this, I think, is what has happened on the Border. It would, therefore, serve no purpose to analyse these weaknesses in a detail which might conceal the fathering virtues. They exist, of course, and we all know it. But then, every people has its own particular skeleton in its cupboard, looming large above the hundred shadowy skeletons of mankind's general fatuity.

Titles are still things to conjure with in Scotland, but Scottish titles, as such, are all comparatively ancient and usually do possess some territorial significance. We don't have the fantastic English system of calling five-hundred-year-old peerages that probably never existed out of abeyance for the benefit of persons whose claim to them is a slender moiety. Even our aristocratic foundations were more logical than that: logic, you know, has always been a great asset of the Scot. His thriftiness is the logical result of centuries of poverty and his superior educational system the logical result of having a logical mind. At first sight, then, it's almost inexplicable that he can still appear so feudal at heart. The very working man of the Border, like the wife of a county magnate, knows the names of all the Border families and can string you out the relationships in a surprising manner. But, indeed, all Scotland is more or less of a family affair, and that decidedly is one of the things that so utterly

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differentiates Scottish from English family-life. It gives to the inhuman complexity of a nation the homely touch of a friend and draws together all Scots, wherever they be (out of Scotland), in a common bond of sympathy and protection. There are, undoubtedly, very deep conservative elements in the Scottish character, and the limited size and population of the country keep tradition active in a way scarcely possible in the more apparently-conservative England. Maybe, too, the clan-spirit lingers on the Border with a certain potency, though I fancy this to be a rather far-fetched shot. For myself, I can never cross into the Border counties without feeling at inward ease, and I can never hear the Border intonation (each village with its own peculiarity) without a sense of pleasure. It is, naturally, simpler to criticize than to ppreciate, just as it is simpler to destroy than to build, but that unspoken appreciation, which is inherent love, lies deeper than the most clear-sighted and sardonic censure. I have talked thus openly of the Scots of the Border because in their masterful integrity they are worth an affection and respect that criticism cannot lessen and national predilection should not heighten. Could I add more?

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XIX

A VALLEY IN THE PAARL

I BEGIN to write these words in a kind of dream. I am sitting, as I sat so often nigh on thirteen years ago (it is more now, in re-reading, but let me keep throughout to my old present tense), dangling my legs over the whitewashed parapet of the stoep of this Dutch farm-house. And nothing has changed. Still and shining the valley lies in its unbroken slumber and the peaks of the Simonsberg bear yet that tantalizing air of nearness and spring, that feeling as of youth in age, which used to strike me in the past as I looked upon their grey-blue mass. No, nothing has changed except myself, and in this illusion of timeless peace the memories of my own youth, of those six happy months I spent in this valley, come crowding upon me with a queer insistence. I let them rise like bubbles and hover round me and float away upon the light south wind. It is good to be alive on such a morning, good to feel the continuity of life and the slow passage of the years, good to listen to the doves cooing in the orchards and to see the hens strutting in the stable-yard. It is good, I say.

Here, as I sit, I am at the opening of the Drakenstein valley, which stretches fifteen miles before me, narrowing down from seven miles in width to where the hills close upon it at the village of French Hoek. Mountains surround it on three sides and down its length pours, through reedy beds, the cold Berg river, fed by hilly streams whose waters irrigate the fruit-farms and vineyards of this region. For here, but forty miles from Cape Town, we are in the very centre of the fruit industry of the Colony. By fruit, and fruit alone, exists the valley. Its peaches and nectarines, its apricots

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and melons, its plums and pears, its grapes and oranges are known favourably to the dealers of Covent Garden. In these orchards, nestling along the river or perched upon the upland slopes, an exotic harvest ripens in the English winter months. But though tilled, the valley is untamed. Between the farms the hummocky and sandy veld yet riots in its protea bushes and its scrub, and the mountains still harbour baboons and leopards that raid the higher farms at night, breaking into the mealie-patches and stealing the chickens from the fowl-runs. Behind the wind-screens of their trees the orchards lie tucked away and you might walk right down the valley and almost imagine yourself still upon virgin soil. Africa whispers at you under her air of mild repose. There is no mistaking her voice, so different from the voice of Europe, no mistaking the voice of a land whose charm is the charm of distance and whose size cannot be forgotten even in the confines of a few square miles. The charm of distance—the clear distance of morning, the misty distance of noon, the distance, shot with every shade of violet and purple, of twilight—that is the magnetism of Africa. Sitting here, I feel it anew and yet I recognize something else, a more familiar beauty, the beauty of rustic peace, of river-woods, and of farms standing in the shelter of their oaks and backed by little ponds where the kingfisher darts and the weaver-bird builds upon the overhanging tree.

The valley knows no winter in the English sense, though once in a while snow settles upon the hills and often in the colder months wood-fires burn in the grates. Heavy rains interspersed with cloudless spells form the winter, while the summer stifles in long droughts and suffocating warmth. The flooded spruits make walking difficult in the rains, the dust and the enervation make it intolerable in the heat. So one is apt to argue, at any rate, though I must admit that only yesterday I walked from Simondium to Groot

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Drakenstein and back in the full glare of a summer afternoon and felt no inconvenience. The sky was blue above me, not the usual pale blue of Africa but a cerulean blue which dyed the hills and made of all the valley the lining to an exquisite shell. . . . But of the four seasons give me spring and autumn. In spring the veld is green, the pippits go sighing above you in the dusk, the beetles roll their balls of dung along the roads, and the days are lengthening in gladness; in autumn all is withered and the harvest is over, but the land is cooling, the nights refresh one at last, the first rains begin to fall, and the red dust is laid. One breathes again!

Never have I seen anything to match the sunset colours on these hills. The ridges blaze like fire-opals in the sky, peak after peak suffused in rosy tints above the draped shadows of the ravines, and all the tiniest crags coming out in splendour as the sun catches them in its descent. The whole effect is of some magic city raised in the clouds. Then swiftly, as at the close of a dream, as at the sinking of a conflagration, the spires recede, the colours fade, and, in the engulfing darkness sweeping on it from all sides, the city has crumbled into a handful of ashen rocks. In those minutes of fabulous glory, when a new heaven is created out of nothing, and matter itself is resolved into colour, the soul shivers as before a celestial choir.

But the mountains are always beautiful. Driving clouds cast fantastic, fleeting shadows across them, sunny skies give them an air of everlasting and watchful rest. Theirs is the dignity of an endless reserve. Rugged mountains they are, precipitous and inaccessible, with stunted trees growing about their base and the bare rocks towering above. The Drakenstein guards two sides of the valley, the Simonsberg shuts off our world from the world of Stellenbosch and the Cape Flats. Nearest to us and grandest in contour, the Simonsberg has ever been to me a symbol of inanimate,

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unchanging power. At night I go out into the field in front of the house and gaze upon its outline like the swell of a vast wave against the sky. An enduring and noble sight, magnificently calm, lifting one at a bound above all the petty turbulence of the earth. Indeed, night transfigures the whole valley and another spirit seems to be abroad over the land. Not long since I was walking through the orchards of this farm with a girl who has lived here most of her life, a sensible girl not given to fancies, when suddenly turning to me she remarked, "I feel more and more that there is something mysterious about Africa." I started at the unexpected words, which, commonplace in repetition, were not commonplace as uttered. In the midday stillness the valley and the hills appeared all at once touched with a new significance. "Mysterious?" I answered; "in what way mysterious?" "I feel it," she replied slowly, and looking round me then I seemed to catch the ghost of her meaning. I know that I have caught it now: this instant I have come out of the night into this lamp-lit room and the mystery is strong upon me. It is the mystery of the old and sinister and inhuman, of that which drowses in the sunlight and emerges, brooding, at the decline of day. Throughout her illimitable space Africa is grieving over her ravished empire. In the majestic loveliness of the night, with the big stars flying over the Simonsberg like a covey of golden birds and the unbroken silence around, above, she stalks inconsolable. Yes, I feel the mystery of a continent upon me. Who knows all that is hidden and who has discovered the Ancient of Days?

I was talking of reminiscences and my thoughts go back now to a certain day many years ago when, in the company of a friend, I first learned that Africa is not as other countries. It happened in thiswise. I had been asked to lunch at a farm beyond the Simonsberg, and in the sparkle of a spring morning we started to climb over the range through a gap of the hills between

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Kanon Kopf and the main ridge. I am sorry to say that we arrived an hour and a half late and left finally under the cloud of an acrimonious discussion, but, as we began to foot it homewards, so began the wizardry of our walk. We made for the distant pass at the end of the Simonsberg which, like an arrow, divides its livid walls from those of the Drakenstein. The afternoon was gathering in and the lonely cliffs took on the gorgeous flare of the setting sun. O miracle of departing day in which the world was transfigured! In this tract, unknown to us before and never visited by me since, there dwelled a grotesque and unheard-of strangeness.. The desolation glowed as with a light unseen of man and the very air tingled with a wild buoyancy. We walked, and as we walked the nightly change was fulfilled, the mountains evanesced, and the veld began to smell with the odour of night-flowering plants. Right across the waste we struck, striding on mile after mile through the starry darkness. What thoughts stirred in us then, what hopes never to be realized!

This friend of mine had come for two days and remained for three weeks. I was, at that period, living with another man in one of the outbuildings. He worked on the farm—I recuperated from an illness. No one knows better than I how to let the days revolve in idleness and I can truthfully assert that my chief activities were confined to the cooking of lunch and supper. I have cooked successfully for as many as five and I have made dismal failures of meals for two. My successes consisted mainly of a soup having for its foundation the remnants of the morning porridge and enriched by chops, onions, potatoes, apples, beans, soup-squares, and whatever else might turn up. We never tired of that dish and who knows what we wouldn't have added to it if we had had the chance. My failures arose, usually, from neglect of the paraffin stove which, on the slightest provocation, would fill

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the room with evil-smelling blackness and ruin the dinner. That was bad, but worse still was the total forgetfulness which would overtake me from time to time. I remember once asking a young man to lunch (he had to come some distance, too) and producing for his edification nothing but a raw cabbage and a pair of socks. He was afterwards, and quite rightly, heard to express himself with extreme bitterness about the incident. I felt penitent myself, but, all the same, he was not the sort of young man one would grieve over, and I may add that I derived a certain sly pleasure from my carelessness. "Socks," he exclaimed, "and a raw cabbage; now I should never have expected such treatment!" But I gave him worse treatment one evening at a dance in Paarl—however, I will keep that incident mum. These dances, whether in Paarl or in the valley, were great sport. The wheels of the Cape carts and the buggies would be heard upon the roads and shouts of greeting echoed clear and far as over the smooth waters of a lake. The dancing was kept up energetically to the music of a coloured band, and, in the early morning, men, who three hours later would be at work in the orchards, have been seen striding across the veld in evening slippers.

What jolly days those old days were!—though I have not yet reached that stage of decrepitude in which one fondly looks back upon the past as the sole repository of romance Not yet! Every day I would call at the house for Bob, the black mongrel, and together we would go down to the winkel to make the day's purchases. Poor Bob, he loved me dearly because I used to buy him sausages! He is dead long since and his son, Zola, is at this present moment lying in the kitchen, overcome by sloth and infirmity. He has never been the dog his father was. Bob was foolish but adventurous, Zola is foolish, timid, and so much the victim of mental inhibitions that there is now only one direction in which he dares to walk.

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The cry of "Sah," which stiffens into alert attention the tail of every other dog in South Africa, leaves his unmoved and he even allows flies to crawl upon his nose without protest. Well, well, this is not a chapter on dogs. . . . I was explaining how I used to go down to the store to make purchases. It was kept by a very horsey and loquacious youth who was always going bankrupt and turning up once more with a smile of profound happiness. I can't opine why. In those far-off days it was a place of gaiety where you could juggle with eggs over a heap of sawdust and break as many as you liked provided you paid, but now, under its present Jewish proprietors, it has settled down into a strict house of business. I had reason to go there the other night to buy some Boer meal and I was astonished at the number of coloured people swarming in at the door. In the warm moonlight, with the blanched shadows playing on the hedges, the noise of crickets in the grass, and the brown faces clustered in the glare of the lamps, I was reminded strongly of some West Indian scene. But coloured people are not negroes: in fact, it would puzzle an ethnologist to say precisely what they are. The blood of whites, and Hottentots, and Malays, and the inhabitants of St. Helena is represented in this degenerate and harmless race. For six days in the week they conduct themselves laboriously and with circumspection, but on a Saturday they are apt to fill themselves with wine or dop and to close the night by reeling, with tipsy song, over the valley. A tame performance, after all. Personally, I had a Kaffir for my servant, a boy named John, who, besides having an ingrained contempt for all coloured people, was much concerned as to the exact significance of "Gov'ment." It seemed to him one of those fearfully inexplicable evils that had been invented by white men merely to make you perform irksome and unnecessary acts. John was a kind of untutored disciple of Tolstoy or Herbert Spencer—

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though he appeared to lag behind them in ethical austerity. "But what is de Gov'ment?" he would ask for the hundredth time, pausing in the act of sweeping the floor and continuing a conversation of yesterday as if it had just ceased. "De Gov'ment say to John, 'You no do dis, you no do dat, you pay tax' —John no like Gov'ment, John tink Gov'ment velly stoopid." My answers were, I own, not even meant to be enlightening—but, of course, there was always the lingering doubt whether the laugh were not on his side. These natives have a way of saying just what they think you want them to say. And John was a cunning native. He used to call me a "twice man"—though my waist-measurements compared very unfavourably with those of his chief. He also liked to prolong all discussions that kept him from work. For he was not fond of work. Some time later, after I had left the Colony, a friend of mine met him in Cape Town carrying a small paper parcel with absorbed attention. John told him that he was now attached to a shop. It was the form of employment that would suit him. . . .

When I had put my pot on the stove and had carefully regulated the flame I considered my morning's job over. Then was I at liberty to go and lend a hand with the pruning or to sit upon the stoep and talk redundantly about the world in general. Or sometimes I would get into the buggy and drive into Paarl, that town which gives its name to the district and which lies five miles to the east. It is a sleepy old dorp, encompassed by vineyards, and is chiefly remarkable for having one street seven miles in length. In front of it, along the valley of the Berg river, opens a wonderful stretch of lowland and wood beneath a spur of the Drakenstein, a panorama reminding one of some elaborated landscape by Wilson Steer. Only a few weeks ago I sat on the deserted station and saw the heath-fires crawling like snakes upon the distant hills.

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It has given me a more romantic feeling for the place than I had thought possible. Nowadays, with the advent of the railway, nothing is easier than to go to Paarl from the valley, but when I was first out here the winter rains used to make the roads impassable and I have known that five-mile drive to be an adventure. Verily things have changed, and now, provided you only have enough patience, you are certain, as I say, to reach your destination.

Yes, I often drove into Paarl to help with the shopping and often about the valley to call at the various farms—those old Dutch farms whose architecture seems almost built into the landscape. An easy social life links up the scattered homesteads, whose symbolic names are themselves the criterion of peace. "Eleven o'clock tea" (that typically South African institution, which here includes not alone tea but light wines and fruits preserved in syrup) draws the women together, and in the slacker seasons of the year dances and what they term "Surprise Parties" are common. The Dutch and English are on good terms and in the valley there is little of that racial bitterness which gives to Union politics their notorious rancour. I do not pretend to account for it, unless it be that success is a great healer or that material interests are too closely interwoven to allow of open discord. The fact remains, and it is a hopeful fact. Of course, the outsider, untouched by passionate or smouldering memories, can regard such questions with a certain witless complacency, can suggest remedies which, as in the case of Ulster and the south of Ireland, may sound reasonable to the rest of the world and be odious to those most concerned; but beneath all this, beneath the snare set for one by the soothing theory that common sense must prevail and that life is founded upon acceptance rather than upon sentiment, there does lie the truth that the future of no country is surely based that permits of the mutual intolerance

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and antagonism of two races. If the dragon's teeth have been sown the sooner they are rooted up the better. I can never think of South Africa without calling to mind the reconciliation-poem of Walt Whitman, the "Word over all beautiful as the sky." Is it hopeless idealism? Mankind is not very magnanimous. . . .

But all this time my pot has been simmering on the stove and when I hear the bell clanging for the "Cease work" I get ready to serve up lunch. Pray that it hasn't been spoilt! If it has I shall undergo various humiliations, if it hasn't I shall soon be sitting outside, blinking in the sunlight, preparing for my afternoon sleep. Towards evening I sometimes used to walk across the vlei down to the Berg river. The setting sun poured its gold over the earth, and the level fields shone peacefully in the raying light. That was the hour when the river seemed to flow more gently and when, glimpsing it through the wooded patch, it looked as if no man had ever stepped upon its banks before and as if presently some wild beast would creep out of the jungle to drink and vanish again. Thus, in wordless contemplation, have I sat there for hours until the shades deepened and the night-breeze began to sigh in the reeds.

Oh, yes, the valley is a strange place! I often think that if I were to live here I could not rest till I had written a book about it which would try to explain its fascination. The story of the farms and Huguenot settlements has been attempted (Theal's *History* is interesting on this latter point), but the materials are fragmentary and there is much that can never be known. The Dutch are curious in this, that, though they love their land, they have little sentiment about it, caring neither for the chronicles of their possessions nor, indeed, whether they live on the properties of their forefathers, provided they can but live where the soil brings forth. The old legends have been obliterated

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under a succession of changes, and despite the theory that the Queen of Sheba visited the valley some sceptics are inclined to doubt it. Still, there are evidences here of men who had mouldered into dust tens of thousands of years before ever the Queen of Sheba flourished. On the slopes above Simondium, hidden a few feet under the veld, palæolithic stone implements have been unearthed by the plough. They belonged to a breed whose other traces have utterly died, and yet, handling these stones and imagining the sort of use they were put to, one feels, through the mist of ages, the stir of a primeval instinct, the link of a fellowship binding us to the cavemen of yore. No, the history of the valley can never be written, but it can be pictured, and in this picture it would emerge as a sentient being enslaving men's hearts and rewarding them according to their toil. Its treasures and activities would make the foundation of my survey. Its chief glory is, perhaps, its botany. Such heaths are not to be found outside the Western Province, and such wild flowers, painted ladies, nerinas, africanders, papies, and many more, in any other country of the globe. In witness, I recommend to your notice Marloth's *Flora of South Africa*—one of the choicest books ever produced. The arum lily blooms in every ditch and in the springtime of the year life wakes in the very dust and the whole veld is literally carpeted with fragile and lovely petals. Some knowledge of botany is universal throughout the valley and is encouraged by the shows at French Hoek, but I have found no one to tell me anything accurate about the birds. It is rather remarkable, for the valley is rich in beautiful species. In the scrub of the high land, on the steep banks above the streams, where you must walk warily lest you trip over the holes of ant-bears or porcupines, I have sat of an afternoon and watched the flashing wings flit incessantly from bush to bush. All along the valley this ceaseless life wheels overhead, rejoicing in the air,

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expanding its brilliant plumage in the sunlight. No one notices it and, in the unheeded pageant of its existence, it goes on its way as though man had never come to invade its sanctuaries.

The birds, the flowers, the animals, the face of the rocks, the life of the farms, the science and industry of the fruit—they would be drawn together, in my book, in a kind of diary of long walks and daily happenings. And man? Ah, that is not so simple a question. Beneath the equipoise of any Eden there lurks a spirit of unrest, ambition, and desire. One could but skim the surface of these things, avoiding, alike, the complex and the trivial, and keeping one's eye level with the harmony of the outward world. Man, in such a book, must appear as a child of the earth and not as her master. And from this embryo-scheme, in which all voices are equal and but one at last, would grow the sense of a living identity, a dissolving picture of life that changes but never dies. The seasons would enter into my work, the rolling years would pass before me, and the whisper of the earth would be heard. . . . Such, O reader, is the ease with which one can plan the impossible!

I mentioned just now that I would like to write of "The science and industry of the fruit." To be truthful, I would like to do it but I could not. For that would make a volume by itself, a volume in which my contribution would be half-a-dozen impressionistic (and resented) pages. It pleases me to see the fruit growing in the orchards, to see it heaped in the packing-cases where coloured women are wrapping each individual pear or peach in tissue paper, to see the wagons go rumbling down the valley on their way to the cold storage or the ships, but my pleasure is an ignorant one. The general outlines I have observed, the details are for experts. The fruit is no sooner gathered than the work of the next season begins. The ploughing, the cultivating, the pruning, the spraying, make

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up a ceaseless and vigilant round. There is no crop in which haphazard methods would more quickly bring disaster. Is it not rather fine to think how over this valley men are moiling from dawn till dusk to tear wealth out of the old earth? Rather fine and rather tragic? Seen from above they resemble gnats fretting the surface of a pond. And presently darkness falls, and on the morrow, behold, the pond remains but all the gnats are gone!

But I will not attempt moral philosophy. The sun is sinking now and the hens are beginning to roost in the branches of the fig. Boys are leading home the mules and the men are making for their cottages in twos and threes. The light will linger yet awhile and the contented breathing of the cows will be heard before the owl hoots in the great oak. It is the hour when thoughts wander and when the past floats before one in feeling rather than in memory. I look up at the Simonsberg and in the film that is descending upon it I am conscious of a similar film upon my heart. Forgotten incidents, forgotten thoughts rise before me in silken and hazy recollection. Memory is much a matter of sentiment and, in the mechanism of our brains, the good abides, the bad is lost in a sort of cosmic forgiveness. I speak of the personal life—but even political hatreds survive, at length, mainly through artificial propaganda. It is better thus. At this moment, gazing upon these hills, there is no ache in my heart but only a little regret for the vanished years. I saw them so often once with other eyes, with the eyes of youth, that the sight of them now cannot be but somehow strange in all its familiarity. That, possibly, is why an odd memory of them thrusts itself upon me and will not be denied. I had gone climbing there one day with Bob and a disreputable acquaintance of his, when, suddenly, at the top, a bank of fog from the other side met us like a wall and the baboons started howling around us in the mist. (Petrarch must

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surely have had these creatures in mind when he wrote of the monkey as "an animal repulsive in appearance and gloomy in accomplishment.") It was just as if nature had shown us all at once the hidden menace and treacherous uncertainty behind the mask. We turned and scrambled downhill as though the plague were at our heels and, glancing back, there was the fog crawling over the summit with its wisps feeling for us like the fingers of a blind man. Before us the whole valley was merged in sunlight, behind us the fog advanced like an icy pestilence, like a warning that all is not well on this fair planet. I was invaded by fear and I rushed on like a madman. . . .

Yes, such is the scrap of memory that overtakes me now in this quiet hour. It fits in with my mood of the dream world and the real world. A persistent mood with me at all times and doubly persistent in the twilight. Two red cats are lying upon the warm flagstones of the stoep, licking themselves. Were their doubles here fifty years ago and will their doubles be here fifty years hence and, as now, was it so and will it be that a man sits beside them pondering vaguely upon life, wondering whether it is merely a vista of impressions or whether—but isn't this rather crude theorizing? I know some professors who would be very much shocked. Moreover, the bell for supper has just sounded and I must go in—mealtimes, at any rate, are as immutable as the hills.

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XX

ECHOES FROM PERU

IT is so many years since I was in Peru that the thought of it now is to me rather like the odour that exhales from some chest which, opened suddenly, reveals the scent of dried rose-leaves or lavender, recalling a host of fragrant memories that have lain long dormant in their hidden resting-place. But recollection is a treacherous thing and the brighter it glows the more uncertain may its details be, and therefore if you discern over this chapter a kind of sunny mist, it is the mist of my own mind, which, remembering vividly, yet espies the exact far-off as in a glass darkly.

Let me begin on that afternoon when, fresh from the boat, my brother and I first set foot in Lima, covering the short ten miles from Callao by rail. Lima! I see it now with its splendid central square, fronted by the great Cathedral and surrounded on three sides by Government Offices and shops, with its radiating streets thronged by a black-robed population, with its sordid outskirts dotted by wooden shanties and adobe huts where the half-breeds loll and smoke their eternal cigarettes. Yes, I see it again as an image on my retina, I see the green hills beyond, the crowds hurrying across the plaza as the electric lights begin to sizzle, and the sky deep and starry over the Palace of the President. There is glamour for me in the pale vitality of that image and I shall not break the spell by reference to any detailed account. My sole aid to memory shall be a letter which I wrote to my father on July 24th, 1902, and which lies before me now upon the table. It does not shine as an example of letter-writing, but I perceive that it will be useful;

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for even in those days I had (quite apart from my feeling for atmosphere) a love of figures and a distrust of theories: a thing that has grown upon me, I may add. The knowledge of experts is impressive but their conclusions are doubtful, and I can never read some of the famous authorities on Shakespeare, sex, religion, crime, and so on without my admiration for their learning being tempered by a suspicion of their sanity. But, after all, this has nothing to do with Peru!

We went to the Hôtel Maury, a place of excellent renown amongst travellers, where each bedroom opens through its private sitting-room on to a circular corridor which looks upon the restaurant beneath. I remember that restaurant. The uncooked food was ranged in the centre and each guest, at the polite invitation of the waiter, would rise from table and select his meal. What breakfasts they gave you! I never want to taste better food. The friends of a day would seek us here with the well-known cordiality of exiles and there was a constant coming and going of new faces. In short, Lima gave us the time of our lives.

In the Phœnix Club, our English stronghold, which, from an upper storey, faces the Government Offices across the square, one could watch the fountains playing in the lively noon and the whole outward cycle of the city's movement. The women, I confess, disappointed me. The beauty of the Peruvians is proverbial but overrated. Beneath their lace mantillas, their countenances have a Madonna-like sameness, while youth, departing early, gives way to a plump and dignified middle age. The men of the richer classes have an air of dandified licentiousness, suggesting perfectly manicured nails and loose morals. The silk-hat and the frock-coat were common in my day and are probably common still. Towards evening Society is abroad and magnificent equipages cross and re-cross the square. The ladies, with dead-white

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powder upon their olive complexions, sit bolt upright with the immobility of aristocratic dolls, the men stroke their little black moustaches or pointed beards as they lean forward upon their canes. It used to fascinate me to wonder what their existence really was. Is the spirit of Mayfair or Fifth Avenue alive in Lima or is the crust of civilization very thin? What are the thoughts of these people, Europeanized apparently so far from Europe, what are their homes like, in what consists a claim to be of the Upper Ten or the Four Hundred? I cannot answer these questions, I can only put them; but I presume that here, as in France or Italy, the aristocracy, the descendants of the true hidalgos, leave politics to the bourgeois and concern themselves with religion and intrigue. I should like to delve into the Lima equivalent of Roman "Black" Society—it would be a singular investigation, I think. The Church is all-powerful in Peru, throwing its mantle of infallibility both upon the superstitious Indian of the interior and upon the great lady of the capital. No Government would dare to initiate anti-clerical legislation and thus, as more or less in all the South American Republics, we see the anomaly of democratic institutions battened upon by a force that abhors the very name of socialism. But then liberty on this continent, where the despotism of a President or a Dictator is apt to be something much more ferocious than the despotism of an Absolute Monarch, has been too often a mere orator's gag. Your South American is the victim of high-sounding and patriotic words, words that kindle his imagination but leave his rapacious heart untouched. (I speak of a type to which there are many exceptions.) So in a cinematograph theatre can you observe the roughest element in a crowd cheer the successful detective. And he is sentimental. The Peruvian, going on a journey, buys a small volume of flowery lyrics and devours it with genuine emotion. An eloquent race,

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responding easily to the eloquence of others. Though courtly and in some respects idealistic, it cannot escape the ugly strain of its mixed blood, the brooding malice of the Indians, the fiery cruelty of the Spaniards. Savage instincts lurk beneath the polished surface. It is as if, in the uncertainty of South American society, values could be transformed in a flash. But one has seen the same thing in Europe of recent years and one ceases to ask. It is always an error to judge one country in terms of another, and if you would understand the psychology of the South American it is safer to read a novel like *Nostromo* than a set treatise by some outside enquirer. Conrad had Ecuador rather than Peru in mind when he wrote this book, but scratch any South American and a similar man appears. And what an extraordinary book it is, this epic redolent of the very atmosphere of a continent! . . . To be frank, I like the Peruvians but I have no faith in them. As for the half-breeds—well, one naturally despairs of half-breeds: that goes without saying.

Lima is one of those cities that could never be mistaken for anything but a capital. Being the seat of the spoils, it is the ordained home of political instability. Ferment underlies its placid exterior—the cork has only to be drawn and, pop, out froth the passions of the mob. It is the old game of the "Ins" and the "Outs," and calculating heads stand grinning behind each ebullition. I, myself, have seen how, on a mere rumour, there was a frantic rushing to and fro, how, so to speak, the earth opened to belch forth its noxious underworld upon the streets. But revolutions are not what they were, have become rare, indeed, and perhaps people have begun to weigh more critically the value of fine sentiments in ignoble mouths. To my eager and youthful eyes all this was but a spur to romance. It helped to engender the illusion of strangeness with which Lima inspired me. In its stores, before its bookshops full of erudite works in

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Spanish—the research of South Americans has fatally undermined the reputation of Prescott's *Conquest of Peru*—I have sometimes been overwhelmed by the sudden thought that I was actually in Peru, in the land of Atahuallpa and of Pizarro, in that fabled realm of gold and parrots. But, above all, I think it was the sense of the veneer concealing barbaric passions that so excited me. I remember one evening when it was already dark and the lighted cafés were crowded with ardent politicians, wandering about the streets, attempting to purchase a white tie and a pair of pumps. In this gilded world I felt as unreal and solitary as one feels in the gorgeous web of a dream. Fancy trying on shoes in Lima! And the shop-assistants might have stepped straight out of Bond Street. That was the enigma! Would they go home presently to respectable suburbs or would they throw off, with their work, the inner garment of the European? It is a sealed book. Cunninghame Graham and Hudson can tell me of the gaucho of the plains, of the horses and the birds, but who will unveil for me the soul of the great cities?

I succeeded in buying what I wanted, which was fortunate, as that evening I had to attend a ball given by the Phœnix Club in honour of our late King's Coronation. They did it in style, hiring a large hall in which were stationed two bands, one at the top end and one at the lower. Thither repaired in due course the whole English colony and the elect of Lima and Callao. A brave assembly, resplendent with jewels, uniforms, and my new shoes! Before each dance we solemnly paraded the room with our partners and at the finish quitted them with ceremonious bows. I waited long enough to see the arrival of the President in his State coach, an insignificant little man wearing a bowler, and the sudden hush that fell upon the room as he entered, followed by the formal notes of the Peruvian National Anthem; then, slipping out

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unobserved, I walked home in silent exultation. Lima slept around me.

Altogether, the Phœnix Club came out strongly at this time. It organized sports and I recall a smoking-concert it gave in its own rooms where limericks were sung and where an elderly gentleman took me apart and implored me never to tell his wife anything he might have said. As I knew nothing about his wife and was leaving for England the next afternoon I was able to give him the promise with perfect assurance. Truly, my days in Lima passed in revelry and exploration. I cannot recollect everything, but one night I remember being taken to dine at the National Club, an institution for the rich if ever there was one. We sat down at a table laden with cut glass and silver and feasted as you might feast in London or Paris. All is vanity!

These, then, are a few glimpses of the town. I see Lima and I see it not, but always I feel its magic in my blood, its calm immanent with storm, its culture hiding not the jungle. There is something as fantastic about Lima as there is about those bodies you find in its curio-shops, out of which the old Peruvians removed all bones and squeezed all moisture, making a man into the size of a child and preserving for repulsive immortality the flesh of their fathers. Indeed, indeed, it is a fantastic city. No other adjective is so appropriate. Those who have been there, who have looked upon it with seeing eyes, will bear me out. They, too, must have heard the tremor of the wild. . . .

I may observe here that I have mingled above the reminiscences of two visits—the first a mere inkling. We had not been in Lima a day when we had to start for Oroya in the high Andes. It is one of those journeys which leave language in the wake, but I will try to bring an impression of it before you now. You must forgive me if I fail; it needs a Whymper to combine literary art with Andine rambles, and as, in

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those days, I had no thought of storing up impressions I simply went by train and treated the whole thing as any inquisitive youth might have done. At the commencement, the line runs through a fertile land which slopes in wide undulations upon the foothills, and at Chosica, which is almost twenty-five miles from Lima, you are barely 3,000 feet above sea-level. It was a gloomy morning. A thick mist hung curtain-like, but, lifting suddenly, revealed ahead of us the towering, vast wall of the Andes. The outer ramparts confronted us there, as, hemmed in by the multitudinous sweep of the rocks, we wound inwards and upwards from one terraced valley to another. Steeper grew the ascent and at St. Bartolomé, which is only fifteen miles beyond Chosica, we had already reached a height of 5,000 feet. The zig-zag principle here comes into play, the engine pulling or shoving alternately and, without any rack or pinion, seeming to scale the sheer side of the cliff. Far above you yawns upon the precipice the black mouth of a tunnel which, in twenty minutes, you will enter with a screech. It is like a never-ending and impossible canter. Complacently, without hurry, without delay, you clamber as to the summit of the world. Beneath you gleams the line you have just traversed, above you the line you have yet to traverse, while at your feet, with other lines upon the further slope, rushes a foaming torrent. Such is the track of the Ferro-Caril Central del Peru, such the trail of the giant snake that winds, glittering, into the Andes.

At a God-forsaken place called Matucan, which is fifty-six miles from Lima and 7,800 feet above the sea, we stopped for a meal. The setting was quaint and the service casual. Plates were flung at us by dirty hands and we had to drink our acrid, scalding coffee at a gulp. Here we saw our first drove of llamas, those beasts of burden of the upper Andes, those offensive and tireless relations of the camel. They stood

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outside the station, working their fleshy under-lips and winking their wicked eyes. Out we jostled from the eating-room, gave them a glance, and went on our way into still gaunter recesses. The higher we clomb the more monstrous became the desolation. The hoot of our engine rang out upon the stony walls and the clank of our wheels swirled and echoed in the void. Some primeval Attila might have strode, ravaging, over this tortured wilderness. How was the line surveyed? I remember one spot where a bridge, perilously hung above a watery ravine, joined the mouths of two tunnels and where you passed from darkness to darkness with one shuddering glimpse beneath. Ten thousand feet is reached, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and yet above you frown the everlasting rocks. The air grows rarefied, you pant quickly like a dog, and a cold wind from the snow strikes chill into your breast. It is as if you would never cease climbing and as if, in the inaccessible hills, the shout of "Excelsior" resounded for ever. The exhilaration of the heights is born of an isolation akin to terror, and in nightmares I still revisit, fearfully, a spectral Andes. It is curious how sleep affects the emotions, throwing upon some things a supernatural dread and upon others a thrilling enlightenment. In dreams we are all extremists. There is scarcely a man who has not committed suicide in his sleep, flown, composed beautiful poems. And then, that whimsical element which reminds one somehow of the gnome-stories of Lord Brabourne or the drawings of Heath Robinson or perhaps, even, of the music of Grieg! Why, when I dreamed the other night that I went up into an old loft to look for an owl's nest, should I have found the floor littered with dead cats, some mummified with age, others puffed out and their eyes all musty?

In the midst of the long tunnel Del Paso de Galera we gained the summit at 15,665 feet. The railway

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has since, I hear, been carried up to a mine at 16,800 feet—but I am quite content. There is no object in making your victory over nature too vainglorious. She has the last word. . . . Rumbling forth into daylight we emerged before the majestic swell of Mount Meiggs, whose snowy peak soared in dizzy triumph on our left. We were going downhill at last and the brake-blocks sang hoarsely upon the wheels. And, by-and-bye, in the wane of the afternoon, we slid into Oroya, which lies in all its sparseness at an altitude of 12,200 feet. In those days it was the terminus of the line and caravans from the interior converged incessantly upon it with their droves of llamas, ponies, and donkeys. It had an air of somnolent activity and even boasted an hotel with a French billiard-table. A river, neither wide nor deep, dashes past Oroya on its east-bound fall to join the headwaters of the mighty Amazon. There I used to sit and watch the Peruvians and Indians go by me wrapped in their ponchos of vicuna or llama wool and looking like rather unsuccessful brigands. But the town, itself, does not tempt my memory.

We remained for two days in this dreary hole and on the third hired horses and a guide and set forth on our eighty mile jaunt to Cerro de Pasco. On that huge plateau, twelve to fourteen thousand feet above the sea, there was little to show that you were not upon the level pampas of the plains. Against the skyline the Andes ringed our world, condors floated in the still serene, wild geese circled afar. We kept up a steady jog-trot of six miles an hour and every twelve miles or so would stop to refresh ourselves at one of the camps of the American surveyors. A bleak and monotonous ride, punctuated by warm drinks and handshakes and by the excitement of being thrown over your horse's head. Towards evening we reached the village of Junin, whose outskirts are inexplicably divided into hundreds of little stone-bound empty squares. Like Oroya, it owes its existence to the caravan traffic in

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copper and silver ore, and now that the railway is open to Cerro de Pasco it has probably sunk into merited obscurity. At the third camp we halted for the night, and to the amusing and unrepeatable stories of an American I fell asleep, tortured by a mountain headache, to awake refreshed and vigorous with the dawn. The second day passed like the first. We rode, halted, and rode again. At one of the camps, if I remember rightly, we discovered a countryman of mine, a man with a bristling red beard, who cooked for us as he discoursed upon the beauties of Ayrshire. A hungry dog snarled round the hut, which lay at the foot of a small knoll—one of these knolls on which yellow trefoil grows in Scotland—only to bolt in every now and then and gobble up the remains of the macaroni which were being thrown out at the door. There was a familiar touch about that picture which has made it linger in my mind, surrounded though it be by a blank on every side. . . . In the evening we arrived before Cerro de Pasco, which spread beneath us up a hollow, with the smoke of all its furnaces giving it a wild and witch-like appearance in the dusk. Slowly we dawdled through this town of 7,000 people and dismounted before the principal inn, which had the exact look of having been constructed out of packing-cases and kerosene-tins. They put us into a bedroom next to a dining-saloon of extreme filth, whose sideboard was tastefully decked out with a row of guinea-pigs ready for the spit. They are a considerable delicacy in these parts, are guinea-pigs, and though I have never tried one I imagine them to be succulent: and I daresay, when all is said and done, they would rather be eaten than vivisected. In the middle of the night a hideous uproar awoke me and several revolver shots rang out in the passage. But in this land of surprises such things are a mere trifle and I composed myself again to sleep. Later I enquired as to the cause but, hearing only a vague and hopeless sort

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of yarn, held my peace. Never concern yourself with other people's affairs in countries like Peru.

Oroya stands at a height of 14,000 feet and starting thence in the grey and foggy dawn we resembled a ghostly cavalcade fleeing in hooded silence from the place. It was very cold. Through a contracted pass, following the bed of a mountain burn, we twisted down a road bestrewn by boulders and reverberating to the confused sound of tumbling water. Several of the old Peruvian silver-mills were yet at work, pounding up their three tons a day. The primitive conservatism of peasants survives all the changes of conquerors and time, and here, as in Palestine, the agèd world lives on unconcerned. It took us some two hours to descend the nine miles and 2,000 feet to La Quinna—the ultimate goal of our wanderings. But it greeted us, at last, with a smile, and in this pleasant valley we rested from our labours.

[From the labours of travelling, I mean. For our three weeks in La Quinna were far from idle. A gold-mine had drawn us thither, one of those mines long worked, long abandoned, and now re-started by the scheming energy of Englishmen; and on the morrow we beheld the side of a hill all riddled by workings and cut open like a ripe orange. Chuquitambo—the Hill of Gold! The mine lay a thousand feet above the valley, and every morning, very early, we would enter the corral, mount a mule or horse, and climb the abrupt hillside by the narrowest of steep and narrow paths. The horses were more sure-footed than the mules, but at that altitude neither could go fifty yards without stopping to breathe, and coming down they would put their four feet together and slither from one sharp corner to the next. It is the kind of excitement one doesn't relish at first. The routine of the days did not vary. I sat with my Indian, ready for the samples of ore my brother kept sending out to me. We hammered, mixed, divided into four, and threw away all

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but a quarter. Then we repeated the process again and again till nothing remained but a small bagful of dust, which was carefully sealed up, labelled, and despatched downhill to the assaying-office. It was not engrossing work but it required a certain rigid attention which kept the mind engaged and made the hours speed by. Every now and again the hill would shake to a blast of dynamite and a shower of rocks would crash into the ravine; and every now and again my Indian helper would suddenly stop, look me straight in the face, and make a shameless request for "*Plata.*" The desire to do this, I infer, overtakes them at the most inconvenient moments and is never resisted. But they have good qualities, including a keen sense of humour and a great power of physical endurance. They get this latter from the deceitful drug cocaine, which, in the form of coca leaves rolled into a lime-centred quid, they chewed officially from three to three-thirty each afternoon. As I say, they were a jovial lot and if they did get drunk every Sunday what did it matter? My old assistant, who used to pucker up his cunning face till his eyes almost disappeared and a thousand wrinkles covered his parchment skin, had a passion for buying tinned hams at ten shillings each. But then I found they all had. They were reckless in spending the money they made so hardly and the more capricious the expenditure the better it seemed to please them.

These Indians, I take it, hail rather from east Andine tribes than from the Incas, but I don't suppose their blood is pure, though they have the Mongolian features of all South American aboriginees. The children are pretty, the men repulsive, and the women, for ever combing their straight black hair, more repulsive still. If you can follow me, they carry through these windswept regions an extraordinarily autochthonous aspect, as though they had dwelt there since the beginning of time, as though they had been

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born from the very rocks themselves. It gives them a certain, not dignity precisely, but authority of their own.

At midday a small boy would bring up our lunch of hard-boiled eggs, steak, and sausages stuffed with raisins, to be washed down by heavy Spanish wine. The manager had an Indian cook, and as we, together with most of the white staff, lived in the house, we fared well. At five we stopped work for the day and at six-thirty were all seated at the dining-room table spread with its dubious white cloth. At the clattering of knives a buzz of conversation would stir and, in that remote corner of the earth, the problems of western civilization were hotly debated. A man with a pimply forehead used to express heterodox opinions with pugnacity and, as he raised his voice, every one would stop to listen, whilst the manager would stroke his fair moustache and gaze round the table with a smile of amiable indifference. But we all talked, and mostly of England and the States. The cloth would be cleared, chairs drawn to the fire, pipes produced, and in the hush of the first cloud of smoke someone would suggest—ping-pong! Yes, at 12,000 feet in the Andes we played ping-pong as if our lives depended on it. And so, retiring early to bed, one day vanished like another. On Sundays we watched cock-fights or, loitering round the house, would follow out of sight the caravans going down towards the unknown east, the tropical and glowing east of the Peruvian hinterland. My mind went with them into some realm like Bates' Amazon, where innumerable insects hover over the swamps and the stillness of immense forests is broken only by the cry of the macaw. But I now suspect that the reality is less rosy.

After I had been about ten days at La Quinna I began to suffer agonies from toothache, and, being finally unable to endure it any longer, saddled a mule and rode up to Cerro de Pasco. As soon as I got there

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I went to the British Consul, whom I shall ever remember as one of the most courteous and kindly old men I have met. He took me into his house, made me have my meals with him, and assured me that all would be well. Then, wrapping his poncho around him, he went off to interview the dentist. I have often wondered who he was and how he came to be in that position. He was the sort of man one meets with very seldom in life, the sort of man who calls forth at first glance everything that is genuine in one. Late that evening I said good-night to him and strolled off to my packing-case inn. On this occasion it had occurred to them to put me into a room over the stables. I believe I have not spent a more miserable night. The snorting of the animals was like an infernal chorus to the throbbing in my tooth, I was as cold as a block of ice, and a tipsy din resounded unceasingly from some distant room. I thought the dawn would never glimmer on the pane, but when it did my spirits revived and I hurried for a hot breakfast to the house of my new friend. He had made an appointment for me, and as we went together to keep it he informed me that the dentist was not only a dentist, but a carpenter and a photographer into the bargain. It wasn't reassuring news. I was introduced in proper form and the versatile one set to work to examine my teeth. He looked grave, shook his head, and suddenly burst forth in a torrent of Spanish to the Consul. I was very much alarmed.

"What's he saying?" I asked.

"He says you've got an abscess and must have the tooth out."

Again the torrent.

"What's he saying now?"

"He says the abscess *may* remain behind."

Once more he burst forth. I imagine he was just going to add that the tooth would probably break.

"Tell him to pull it out," I remarked grimly.

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The dentist seized his pincers, the Consul seized my head, I emitted a yell, and it was all over. I had no more toothache in Peru. The only thing I had was a nasty attack of soroche (mountain sickness) on the doorstep. But that was to be expected. I rode down to La Quinna in a contented frame.

Our stay in the valley drew to a close at length and we prepared for our return to Lima. The Americans at Cerro de Pasco were good enough to provide us with a coach to railhead, and in crowded comfort we re-crossed the plateau. I lay in the back, roaming my eyes over the billowy extent of the pampas. It was better than riding with one stirrup two holes shorter than the other or being thrown off and finding yourself with the saddle in your hand and your horse careering gaily ahead—much better! I revelled in my new comfort, which was quite unexpected and just like waking up at seven when you think it's really eight and time to rise. You may accept all this as a confession of my rooted dislike of horses. . . . We spent the first night at Junin and the second at Oroya. There I met the engine-driver (an Englishman), asked him to have a drink with me, and gained permission to steam over and down the mountains on the tender. Thus, on the third evening, we reached Lima once more and the Andes became for me a thing of the past.

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XXI

ALONG THE CÔTE D'AZUR

TO ninety-nine travellers out of every hundred Marseilles is not so much a city as a port or a junction. They sail out thence into the gulf of Lyons and, looking back, they view it sprawling beneath its hills, or they run through it in the train and, half-awaking from their sleep, they see the flare of its lamps and hear the whistling of its locomotives. The glee of the holiday-maker meets here the sorrow of the exile, but to both it is merely the pledge of things to come. Marseilles, itself, the ancient, great city of Marseilles, lies outside their scheme of exploration and the thoughts of even the merriest seldom linger upon its streets. For some reason it is not considered one of the necessary show places.

As with others so was it with me, and I would have remained for ever in darkness had not the breath of the hundredth traveller passed into my being with a resolve to spend a day there in fresh discovery. A day! Why, a year would hardly suffice. It is a labyrinthine city, a city of multitudinous and changing life, the one town in France that is not overshadowed by Paris. Yet I treasure my day, though it was mostly wasted—treasure it just on account of those glimpses which, in memory, are so often more satisfying than fuller experience. I reproached myself afterwards with my idleness, but I daresay I should do the same again. I had come on shore with two friends and we had resolved to see all that we could, but my resolve had immediately evaporated before an intense longing to sample bouillabaisse and I had spent most of the morning searching for a suitable restaurant. This enthusiasm I managed to impart to one of my

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companions, but the other was adamant. Declaring that he was a fixed admirer of the elder Dumas, and that such an opportunity would never reoccur, he went off to visit the Château d'If. Regretfully we followed his retreating footsteps with our eyes as he moved towards the quay. There was something fine in the determination of this hero-worshipper, something of the spirit of Monte Cristo himself—by the way, I am like a child in the pleasure I derive from reading and re-reading this story of revenge and millions—and it was with pained astonishment, therefore, that we observed him not long after emerge from a street whose reputation is notorious from one end of Europe to the other. Yes, we were grieved. We had seated ourselves outside a café and were pleasantly engaged in drinking a bottle of wine when he hove in sight. Even before he saw us he appeared to be rather overdoing the part of ingenuous sightseer, but afterwards his manner became highly exaggerated. Our laughter seemed to incense him beyond words. "My being here is—is fortuitous," he shouted. "I tried to go to the Château d'If, only I couldn't, and there's the end of it." We rocked on our bench. "Look here, just listen to me," he continued despairingly, and he proceeded to give a sort of old state-trial or General Ivolgin explanation (I mean an explanation at once complex and incomprehensible), illustrating it with dramatic flourishes. "Well, never mind," he said at last, suddenly joining us in our renewed peals. I suggested, in reply, that we had better adjourn to a certain restaurant I had discovered where the bouillabaise had a reputation. We did so, but I herewith declare that Thackeray and the eulogists have overrated the merit of this dish. In my opinion it consists mainly of yellow sauce and small bones—but perhaps I was unfortunate.

My one day went by with unconcealed rapidity—that one day into which I should have compressed a

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year of days and on which, actually, I did nothing. I am concerned to notice that I have given no description of Marseilles; but how can I give one? In every real respect it is unknown to me. The exquisite cameos of the place in Conrad's *Personal Record* are at once my envy and my delight. For me the blur of the big city disentangles itself in the merest glimpses; and glimpses, you know, may be atmospheric but are hardly informative. Besides, however tirelessly I had explored Marseilles, I should still have been ignorant as to its inhabitants, and I fancy the one picture would be of little value without the other. Two learnèd Frenchmen have, I believe, recently written books on the theme that the vilest people in the world dwell upon the shores of the Mediterranean. It's a theory I've long held myself. That mixture of sensualism and sentimentalism, of the love of basking and the love of secrecy, of freedom and ferocity, flourishes here as nowhere else. But to generalize is foolish, and for every vile person there are, quite probably, three that are too charming for anything. In this sea-lapped population the love of dance and song bubbles up as from an endless fountain and paganism is only dead in name. Ennui is unnatural to their philosophy and is a sign of degeneration. Let us have it, that as long as they are warm they are happy. Not profound, I admit, but surely so far correct. . . .

I have never had an opportunity of repeating that day, though I have passed through Marseilles many times since then. At dusk I have greeted it as a spot where food is to be obtained, at night I have seen it in a confusion of noise and electric globes. Ah, those nights! The carriage jolts, the engines whistle, there is a sound of steps. And in the comfort of your berth you open your sleepy lids and smile; your thoughts are upon the morrow. These thoughts of the morrow can be very sweet at Marseilles and it is good to taste them, as it were, in the dead of night. One rests the

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more luxuriously afterwards, as though one had heard the whisper of the coming miracle. For there are, certainly, few things more enviable than to pass from winter to spring at a single bound, to wake up one day in chilly fog and the next in golden sunshine. Indeed, I don't know when I have felt a more delicious sensation than I did one January morn, when, speeding eastwards from Marseilles, I gazed all at once upon the glowing outline of the Côte d'Azur. I had woken as refreshed as one usually is after a night in a train and had buffeted my way along to the breakfast-car for a cup of coffee, when, there, as I sat down by the window, the whole scene burst upon me with the very breath of flowers and spring. There was blue sky above, blue sea across the heathery flats, and blue-grey hills beyond a ridge of pine. It was one of those moments that come to men for their rejuvenation. And as I sat there, drawing-in the light, I thought incredulously, "Yesterday I was in London." How long ago! The train rocked, the country rushed away from us, the sea sparkled in the distance. I could have shouted aloud. My blood pulsed. The soft, mild air streamed into the carriage and above the rattling of the wheels I heard the soundless, the universal chorus of the earth. Again I muttered to myself, "Yesterday I was in London." In that redolent odour of the South the thousand vague yearnings of mankind were lulled and in their passing there was no slightest feeling of satiety. And that, after all, is the triumph which so few triumphs achieve. Satiety and boredom are the curse of life, the growing fungus of the years, so deeply and poisonously rooted that after, say, the age of twenty-five there is hardly a minute of pure pleasure in all existence. O World, O Life, O Time!

It was not the first occasion on which I had made this journey, though the previous one had been in summer when the contrast and the freshness were no

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longer there. Moreover, my mind was otherwise engaged just then with the idea of breaking the Bank at Monte Carlo. Breaking ?—well, perhaps wounding would be more accurate. My hopes were comparatively modest. A friend of mine had devised a system—he preferred to call it an "accountancy method of play"—and we had resolved to test it in the great place itself. I confess that gambling fascinates me. Not that I am a real gambler, one of those people who lose their sense of proportion, but simply that it fascinates me and that the fascination is not all pleasure. I believe that if I were the King I should for ever be trying just how far I could go. . . . At any rate, we had resolved to test the system. I think that on the first day we made about a hundred and thirty louis, that on the second our gains were reduced to about eighty, and that on the third we got panic-stricken and escaped with that sum. Systems may be all right (though I have my doubts), but human nature is not.

It was an odd visit, made at a time of the year when Monte Carlo is deserted and half the few players at the few tables are sure to be the maniacs of systems. We stopped at one of these small, second-rate hotels up a side-street, which continue open all the year round and where you get your dinner on a stone balcony level with the pavement. It was in the late afternoon that we arrived, and when evening came we strolled down to the Casino and experimented with five-franc bits. Everything went famously, and next day we plunged into the fight. We had our ups and downs, but we ended well, and that night we knew the joy of victory as we counted piles of louis d'or in our locked bedroom. But in the gambler's heart no victory is more than a prelude, and there lurks the danger. The Bank doesn't only rely upon its percentages: it relies on human hope and human pessimism. The Bank has no nerves, worships no fetish, has unlimited capital,

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and, of course, convenient rules. It exists, in brief, for the purpose of winning. Need I speak of our downfall; need I recount how on the second day when I had gone out for a bathe, leaving my friend to "pick up" a few louis, as he put it, he dumbly greeted me on my return with a face telling of disaster, and how I temporarily retrieved the situation by three plunges, which had nothing at all to do with any system; need I, finally, enlarge on those fateful moments of the evening of the same day when, after considerable pains, "something happened" and we saw our hopes melting under the infamous unconcern of the croupier's rake? No, it's our own affair and I've resolved to tell nothing. *Dixi* . . .

But I must not wander. . . . On this morning, too, I was flying towards the Riviera, but only in search of a steamer. No doubt if gambling offered I should gamble, but if not—I kept an open mind. One by one we passed the towns with famous names—Cannes, Nice, Monte Carlo. Yes, I went by Monte Carlo without a sigh and alighted a mile or two further on at Mentone. And there, in one of those elaborate and large hotels whose drawn blinds had so depressed me formerly, I found my friends and a hot bath. The day was setting in a splendour of peace. In summer, I recollect, there had been languor in the air and the dust had powdered thick the drooping leaves, but to-night the atmosphere was like wine and the whole clear world sparkled in the dying beams. As I went upstairs the early crowds were leaving for Monaco. If it hadn't been for my friends . . . Darkness fell. A picture of awakened night shone out upon the terraced gloom and in its hollow the lamps glittered from sea to hill. Who does not treasure these few minutes before dinner in which one breathes the very essence of the dusk! I stood there upon the balcony and I blessed existence. This is the import of the evening hymn.

Two Italian conjurers had invaded the hotel and

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proceeded, later on, to give a performance in the hall. They were little men, exactly alike, with immoderate moustaches, and whenever one did a trick they both smirked and bowed to the audience at precisely the same instant, as much as to say, "Aren't we clever?" It was rather pathetic, as they got a very small collection and tried so very hard to appear pleased. One imagined them industriously working all the French and Italian Riviera, smiling gamely from year to year, and living eternally in back-rooms with only one bed and a broken-down washstand. And near by were the riches of Monte Carlo! . . . I turned to the window and beheld far off a streak of radiance over the Casino. Wealth! In the hall beneath the little Italians were counting their francs.

I received a pleasant shock next morning when whom should I meet but the very friend whose system and whose company—he is one of the kindest and most genial of men—had induced the celebrated attack upon the Bank. Let no one doubt my surprise! We spoke of the weather for a time, looking rather intently at one another, and then my friend volunteered suddenly, in an off-hand way, that his system had undergone a revision and that it was now, not only impossible to lose on a miniature roulette table (where, I may add, it is always impossible to lose), but on the real board at Monte Carlo. Witness, he had started with £150 and had amassed something like £3,000. This news filled me with emotion. Coldly I glanced upon the flower-girls and coldly upon the fashionable throng: the love of money may be the root of all evil, but I fancy it preserves you from some of the branches.

"Let's go at once," I murmured.

"You really want to? To tell you the truth, I was thinking, myself, of——"

"Oh, come along," said I, and we jumped forthwith on to one of the cars of that tramway which, in its tortuous ascent and drop, joins Mentone to

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Monaco. A dazzling ride it is—though I wished it quickly over this morning—with scattered views of the ridged slope and of the sea flaky upon its wind-swept surface. I needed no reminder of Monte Carlo. It was over there, to the right, that we stayed before, and there was where I used to bathe after the midday session, and there are the Gardens which were then dug about as for a graveyard and which now bloom so fairly. Ah, but all has changed, all has risen as from the dead! Even the Casino, that old sinner, looks fresh as a young maiden. Motor-boats are racing in the bay and their loud explosions echo like pistol-shots upon the hill. The pinnace of a millionaire's yacht is puffing leisurely along the coast and row-boats are clustered beneath the rock on whose green lawn the sportsmen of all countries meet this afternoon to shoot pigeons. The jets of smoke and the noise will resemble up here the detonation of toy bombs. What a glorious feat it is! The trap opens, out flies a bird, bang! One to you, Monsieur le Comte. But even if he misses, the bird will return to its dovecote—it wouldn't like to disappoint anybody. Magnificent sport!

We went through the usual formalities for gaining admittance to the Casino, which are not severe provided you don't have your trousers turned up, and entered the imposing chambers. How altered! When I was last here only a few of the central tables were open, but now a four-deep crowd struggles round every seat of that enormous hall. I strolled to and fro. It was agreeable to think that at any instant I could start but that I hadn't started yet, that I was still outside it all and could watch it as from the aloof standpoint of a croupier. I felt like an impatient philosopher—if there is such a thing. I kept glancing round. Look at that old gentleman with a white waistcoat and Dundreary whiskers! He reminds one of a senator and yet he is making feverish calculations

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in a penny note-book. I can see the corner of the gambler's rosy friend peeping out of his breast-pocket. And look at that woman sitting beside him, covered with jewels and with an expression as hard as the diamonds round her wrist! She has just taken two louis from her gold bag and is waiting for some sequence to occur before she puts them on zero. There's the typical gambler's optimism for you! New people are arriving all the time. They *are* a crew! I prefer my two Italians—who are probably rehearsing in a stuffy bedroom before a mirror. Faugh, what a hubbub has just arisen! An Englishman is declaring that the person at his side placed a five-franc piece over his louis at the very shout of "*Rien ne va plus*." The whole table turns to stare at him and at the old, trembling woman whose hand is clutched upon the money. The chef de partie, pale in his black clothes, listens with weary impartiality and shrugs his shoulders. He looks at the croupiers and they shrug their shoulders, too. Nobody knows, nobody cares. People shuffle their feet, the hag snatches up the two louis and the two five-franc bits, the Englishman suddenly laughs angrily, and a mechanical voice exclaims, "*Faites vos jeux, Monsieurs*." The incident is finished.

"*Faites vos jeux, Monsieurs—Le jeu est fait—Rien ne va plus*"—how often have I heard that cry! It stiffens every player into strained attention and over every face there comes the same expression of wolfish anxiety. Each one for himself at Monte Carlo! Compassion is out of place when you may be the next victim. Well, yes! You may gain, you may lose, you may lunch at Ciro's on ortolans, you may blow out your brains on the Terrace—and who minds? The ball is spinning—*faites vos jeux*. I remember watching a man once—he had the aspect of an absconding cashier—who in three days divested himself of a vast sum by the rigid application of a system, and whose face wore, I think, the most tragic look I have

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ever seen. And yet on the last afternoon when this man, who had come so lately into the Casino with his pockets bulging with thousand-franc notes, tottered to his feet, livid, his jaws working, his last five-franc bit gone, no one did more than cast a glance of half-contemptuous curiosity at him as they tried to push into his seat.

Strangely enough, the only people who show a glimmer of human interest in you are the croupiers—and, strictly speaking, it is, perhaps, an inhuman interest. I have seen their eyes fastened on various players with a pensive and almost ironical light. I daresay they are only "placing" them in their gallery of types. For I should suppose that gamblers can be subdivided very readily. This man is winning now, but he won't stop till he has lost everything, and then he will return home and lead a respectable life till the end of his days; this other looks quiet but is actually desperate and is worth watching; this one, again, has fanatical faith in a system, and though he has lost steadily for years is bound to gain "to-morrow"; and this one, who talks so recklessly, is really an arrant coward and will give up when he has thrown away five louis. And so on and so on. I wonder whether it is croupiers or patent-medicine quacks who are the greatest cynics in the world? I have heard that the waiters in swell hotels are frequently anarchists, and, by analogy, the employés at the Casino may well be devout students of Schopenhauer. Rumour has it that the croupiers are often taken from the ranks of ruined gamblers, but it sounds too good to be true. Besides, they don't look the part at all. They're the most respectable, impassive set of men—rather like retired colonels. And yet, again, there *is* something singular about them, something you don't meet with in retired colonels. It's a riddle. They are said to get a salary of £300 a year and they certainly work for it. The atmosphere of these rooms is appalling, and even though

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you were making a fortune you couldn't stand it for long. The croupiers have constantly to be relieved. Occasionally you will come across one sitting on some unobtrusive bench or indulging in a quiet constitutional along the beach. And if he recognizes you he will give you, in passing, that questioning, pensive glance which has filled me more than once at the Tables with a sensation of uneasiness. What could they not tell you!

There is still an idea that Monte Carlo is the haunt of wildly vicious aristocrats, full of Grand Dukes, ennobled courtesans, and agents of the Secret Service. But it isn't—not to any extent. It's on the social downgrade—a sort of pasteboard simulacrum of the real thing. It reminds me of those élite restaurants whose chief patrons hail from the suburbs. But it's all right provided you think everyone else is "Someone." And that is what you are meant to think at Monte Carlo. It has got into the hands of the bourgeoisie and they have thrown their romance over it. For they have found their Mecca at last. . . .

My friend had discovered a vacant chair and was in the middle of a contest. I admired his perfect calm, but as far as I could judge fortune was not favouring the system. Indeed, he appeared to be about five hundred louis to the bad; but that may have been my ignorance. At any rate, after some earnest calculations, I saw him deposit several large sums of money successively on one of the colours, which promptly came up. He smiled, rose, and walked over to where I was standing.

"Well, did you see?" he remarked.

"Yes, it was lucky; but suppose it had been the other colour?" I asked timidly.

"Lucky?—you forget my system: I was bound to win in the long run."

"Naturally—only it might have been red, mightn't it?"

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"Ah, but my dear fellow, the whole point of my system is that you mustn't judge it by individual coups. I'm playing against the Bank the game the Bank plays against almost every player: their only advantage over me is half zero—that's to say, 1·35 per cent.—and I try to nullify it by a very slow progression. If the colour *had* been different, what then?"

The answer seemed, at once, so obvious and so painful that I changed the subject. Nevertheless, the fact remains that he does make money and has got the laugh of us all. The old proverb about the pudding is exemplified once more. And even suppose logic is on my side, then the luck, or, as he would put it, the luck of not meeting with a run of very bad luck, must always have been on his—and that's the main thing.

I am bound to tell you that this conversation recurred forcibly to me a few months later when, finding myself again in Monte Carlo, I had the temerity to test this latest development, with the only result that I lost quite a lot. The miserable red insisted on coming up nine times running just because I was on black. At least, that appeared to be its reason. I assure you that my faith in numbers was gravely shaken! When I reached London (which I did by the first train) I hurried to my friend and anxiously enquired of him how it was that I could possibly have lost. "You didn't have enough capital," he answered severely. . . . I'm beginning to think that his sytem is like the Delphian Oracle.

But I have said all I mean to say on gambling and, though I have spoken little about the Riviera, that little is sufficient. The truth is, nobody wants to hear of climbs up to mountain villages, of flower fêtes, and of moonlight drives, while many want to hear stories of the Monaco underworld. But, as a matter of fact, I can tell them no more of one than of the other. I was always respectable and always lazy. But I observed. Yes, I observed. It's an easy word to fall

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back on and it excuses a lot. It gives an air of cynical varnish to one's moderation and pardons an ignorance of lovely demi-mondaines and mysterious villas. But, alas, Monte Carlo, the very Monte Carlo of our novelists, is, indeed, full of illusions. Money is a mere cypher, there and a lady who pays you any attention someone who is likely to—well, borrow it. A double-deep unreality hangs over this atmosphere of rascalism and credulity, and it is, surely, encouraged by the feeling of the unreality of Monaco, itself. Prince and people, alike, live off the Tables and the French concession is the keystone of the national existence. It is not, perhaps, calculated to encourage disinterested patriotism. But if you would know more of the country's history you may consult Metivier's *Monaco et ses Princes*.

I remember one afternoon, on emerging from the Casino, I happened to look up at the hills above the Corniche Road and I thought to myself how beautiful a land this must be if only one had the time to appreciate it. I felt at peace with humanity because I had just made a trifle. Ah, yes, if only one had the time! A shade of purple, streaked with leaden tints and the neutral colours of still heat, enveloped the hills. Everything rested save the lustful hearts of men. And all at once I realized that it was on such hills as these I had gazed that other afternoon when steaming out into the Mediterranean from Marseilles. Marseilles and Monte Carlo—truth and sham! After all, it is not activity, alone, which gives one the genuine sense of life. No. There must be something, evidently, to do with utility at the back of these emotions. The modern romance sees beauty where our grandfathers saw only abomination—in factory chimneys, in goods-yards, in the ebb and flow of cities. But what people forget is that it also sees the beauty that has ever been apparent.

Such fancies fitted easily into my mood when I had

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made, but, when I had lost, all philosophy forsook me and my one desire was to get away from Monte Carlo. So strong was it, indeed, that, to the marked distress of the hotel manager, I insisted on leaving by a train that took twenty-six hours to reach Paris. In the fallen coolness of the night I saw, with relief, the gleams of the Riviera towns fade behind me. The conversation of an uncommonly sane old gentleman in the carriage helped me to forget my woes. My money might be gone, but I, at least, had had the wisdom to go also. Or, rather, I had felt no wish whatsoever to stay. I am not moth-like. And now that I think of it, I have never felt any particular wish to return even. At least, I have never done so.

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XXII

WESTERMOST AFRICA AND ITS ISLANDS

ON a long sea voyage the near hope of land runs through any ship with a kind of fidgety elation. The very cooks, in white aprons and caps, cannot help peeping out of the galley every five minutes to gaze pensively at the gulls wheeling round the mast-heads. Are they not the first sign of the invisible coast? The passengers crowd upon the upper deck, talking fast and aimlessly, and staring ahead. And in that universal expectancy an inner silence seems to have fallen upon the steamer and each beat of her propellers sounds fateful to the straining senses. I remember just such a scene one June afternoon as, eight days out from England, we waited for Cape Verde, that bluff headland of Senegambia and most westerly point of all Africa, to rise out of the sea. It was one of those still, rippling afternoons when a faint bank of cloud droops like a mountain range upon the horizon and the ship hardly sways as she moves steadily onwards. And then, before our watchful eyes, a white rock emerged from the far mist, an airy and insubstantial rock, floating like a loaf of sugar upon the brine. It grew, it took a frowning shape, and the low coast came circling towards it out of the beyond. Slowly we passed, beating round into the harbour, where the afternoon was already drawing in as we anchored. Dakar, the seaport of the Colony, lay before us, a white town picked out with green and scarlet trees. In the basking heat, just tinged by the first shadows, it had the graceful fairiness of all tropical places. A pearly transparence hung over it in the afterglow and the colours stood out unsullied in the darkening sky. Ah, but I know that tropical

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illusion from of old and how the rapture of distance fades before the baseness of reality!

Some natives with shaven heads and glistening bodies had come alongside, balancing themselves in a sort of tub, and were beckoning to us to throw silver coins into the water. But we were an apathetic crowd and their harvest was poor. They might have dived ten fathoms deep and we should only have nodded. The water-boats were already waddling out in tow and in their wake appeared a launch to take us on shore. And we went on shore, skimming over half a mile of ruffled water with our ship outlined behind us against the setting sun. We landed, a small party, on the grimy beach and straggled up into the town. It was good to feel firm ground under our feet, though the ground, itself, was not good. Dakar is a sordid spot, a back-water of the northern Tropics, inhabited by Frenchmen with the set faces of exiles, men who walk moodily along stroking their silky beards, and by an atrocious-looking race of blacks, huge, gaunt beings, with flowing robes clinging round their stick-like legs. And the streets have that fantastic, half-finished appearance one associates with the Tropics. A broken-down pigstye nestles near a warehouse, decay and activity jostle each other, and over the little Public Garden, with its flowering shrubs, with its air of an exotic gim-crack, a few vultures lazily float as though waiting for you to die from sheer inanition. Altogether a nightmare of a place, redolent of hopelessness, but redolent, too, of the secret seduction of the Tropics. There is a feeling here of impermanence, the feeling that man's energy has exhausted itself before he has completed his conquest and that his hold is a mere insidious truce in which he is losing ground every day. Gone is the serenity of the distant view, gone all the beauty, and in its stead there remains but dilapidation and weariness. We are in West Africa, the home of foiled endeavour, a land of sunshine and sudden death,

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inhuman and smiling, whose heart is as the one in *Heart of Darkness*. That story of Conrad's refers, of course, to the wilder and more terrible south, to the Congo itself, but even in tame Dakar, which fringes the desert and not the wilderness, one can feel its poisonous and prolific breath.

We broke up into parties of two or three and strolled about at random, converging gradually upon the launch, that took us back to our ship through the splutter of the evening shower. On board the steamer there reigned din, the din of the barges' water-pumps, but from the decks the illusion had fallen once more upon the town and in the lighted gloom it shone at us across the bay with mysterious enticement. After dinner we went on shore anew and left the scoffing Japanese lying on their deck-chairs, wrapped in their kimonos. They had, as a matter of fact, promised to accompany us, but their enthusiasm had evaporated before the delay and, moreover, the time for baths had approached. So they laughed their mocking and gentle laugh and bade us God-speed. All very well—but how can a sailor argue with a landsman about the land? Tell me that, you apathetic Japanese, and know that the land calls me even as the sea calls you!

So again we trod the streets of Dakar and presently, attracted by an outer flare, found ourselves in a café where a number of Frenchmen were sipping beer and watching a variety entertainment. As an attempt to kill time it could not be called a success. Indeed, I have seen much more entertaining entertainments but never one set in stranger surroundings. Two stout women, with sickly faces and yellow hair, walked to and fro dispensing drinks and compliments. The smell of alcohol and tobacco mingled with the clammy scents of the Dakar night, and in that ramshackle building there was not a person who did not seem overwhelmed by ennui. We stayed till the end and then, in the starlight, strode out towards the native

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village. There, in a moment, you have passed into another world. Bell-shaped huts of straw and loam crowd upon the road, natives sidle by you, and an odour—no, not an odour, a stink, the stink of unventilated black bodies—rises like an emetic from the ground. Bedrock at last! I assure you we escaped back into the comparative mildness of the Dakar smells as a gassed miner escapes back into the open air. But it was an experience.

Yes, we made our escape and celebrated it by playing a game of billiards, a midnight game of billiards, in the flourishing city of Dakar. How many can boast of having done that? But our time was running short and we had no sooner finished than we threw the dust of Senegambia off our feet for ever. The ship slept, even the Japanese steward who had the key of my cabin was sleeping on a mat in the alleyway. The lights on shore were dying and a great silence had descended upon the bay. Seawards all was dark save for one green lamp shining in solemn loneliness at the end of the harbour wall. The calm of space and sleep fell softly upon the senses, fell numbingly as with a whisper of delight. Well is it that, in the inadequacy of words, there are thoughts that can never be divulged and thrilling emotions that can never be laid bare—to keep secret is to keep intact. O magic filaments drawing over the soul! . . .

The next morning we were at sea and Westermost Africa had faded to the north. But it has not faded from my memory and I don't think that it will. It was too much of a landmark. I remember that as I paced the deck I argued with myself that any land is better than no land. I am not a lover of the open sea, which, with its tedious horizon, is to me as the four walls of an enormous white-washed shed. But then, of course, I don't know it, don't know it in spite of my voyages, any more than the flying motorist knows the open country. Only those who go down to the deep

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in sailing ships understand the sea. But even upon my own ignorant dislike the exceptions throng. In the calm oiliness of the doldrums, in the hush of southern nights, there is a spell upon the water. The green underbubbles of the parted waves flash with phosphorus and the moon lies like a bar of silver across the sea. And, again, what joy of freedom comes to one at the instant of departure, at the casting-off from the shore. The old land slips away, the old lassitude falls from one, and a boundless fresh world beckons beyond the horizon. To the landsman the sea is more attractive in sight of land than in mid-ocean. Its splendour and majesty, so visible in all the phenomena of tide-swept coasts, dwindle and wither in the monotony of an endless landscape. To speak frankly, my happiest hours on long voyages have been spent lying on my bunk in the half-drowse of an afternoon snooze. The slight roll of the ship lulls the senses back into the delicious caverns of memory. My youth passes before me and the very hiss of the water is like some mountain burn flowing over smooth boulders between banks of bracken. I am back at home, amidst the heather, in the garden, on the edge of a wood where the pigeons are cooing as they settle down for the night. Like shy and precious friends, these recollections of childhood wait ever for one and intrude not. They stand without the door, demurely smiling, with their finger to their lips, quiescent, biding their moment. And suddenly a tenderness brightens all your soul and a thousand chords tingle sweetly in the mind. While the shadow of the water dances on the wall of the cabin you dance with it and away over the sea, eliminating time and space, till looking down you realize that you are once more only a little boy. That is the way to vanquish death and to forget the sea, the homeless home of the dead. To forget it! I don't want the sea, I want the shore, the living shore, but, anomaly though it sound, it is the deepest seas

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which have given me back my own shores most abundantly. I know, and yet I must admit it —I feel bored in mid-ocean, I feel excited at the approach of land. That very night after leaving Senegambia, as I partook of raw fish, saki, and other Japanese dishes in the cabin of the chief engineer, I yearned to be back in the meanest café of Dakar. I went out from his presence physically replete but famished for the earth.

Indeed, how could one endure that voyage from England to the Cape were it not for places like Dakar and the Islands?—breathing-spots in the void. Not that Dakar counts for much (hardly one ship in a hundred puts in there), but the Islands—they count for something. It is Madeira and the Canaries that break the odious round. I recollect very well, on my first voyage to Africa, rousing up to find our ship steaming slowly along by Teneriffe, whose shores, with houses sprinkled upon their green escarpment, stood forth in the gusty morn beneath a white cloud resting solidly on the Peak. How eagerly I sniffed the air, how generously I embraced the earth! . . . We had no sooner come to anchor than an affable gentleman in a straw hat and a loud check suit, whose face was in immediate need of a shave, fell, so to speak, into our arms (I was with my sister) and announced that he would never leave us. This sudden affection struck me, for one, as rather unnatural and I enquired whether he were not a guide and, if so, what there was to see and how much he proposed to charge. I added that I only asked this out of politeness as we had no intention of troubling his good nature. "I shall not leave you all day," he repeated in a firm voice. Nor did he, though he turned out to be a most objectionable and unnecessary person and had to be rebuked several times for the impropriety of his language. I must explain that we had no sooner tumbled into his clutches than he dragged us off to have breakfast at a

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tavern kept by a friend of his. I think he told us that it was the best in the town, but I am quite sure it was the worst. At any rate, we couldn't drink the coffee they put before us—it wasn't coffee, it was dregs. But our conductor could drink it all right and had probably been looking forward to the arrival of our boat for several hours: it would have been very annoying for him if a host hadn't turned up. There he sat at the table opposite, feasting at our expense and conversing animatedly with the proprietor, while we awaited his leisure. It was a false situation, but when, later, I ventured to point this out to him he appeared so shocked at my ingratitude that the indignant words died on my lips and I could only beg him to overlook it and to show us some of the sights. He proceeded to do so, but as there are no sights worth seeing in the town it was not enthralling. All the same, our lack of enthusiasm visibly affected him and, in order to make his position quite clear, he saw fit to launch forth on a discussion of abstract principles with me. This was really too much and I had to ask him to keep quiet; whereupon he announced that I had offended his pride and that he wished he had never set eyes on us. "That wish is reciprocal," I retorted, as he relapsed into gloom, following behind like a faithful but ill-natured dog. Although he had disdained all monetary discussion during the day he became extremely emotional when, safely back on board, I tendered a certain sum. He wanted to know, in fact, whether I grasped at all what he had done for us. I replied that, to be accurate, I thought he had done nothing and that he had much better take what I offered. He accepted it there and then (like a wise man) and, without a word more, stalked off with a vacant expression. Altogether, he was a tiresome fellow, who quite spoilt our day. Indeed, his insistent presence has driven all recollections of it from my head. It deserved, surely, a happier fate, for Teneriffe is the

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finest of the Canaries, with a diversified history, as you may gather from Humboldt or Burton or from Espinosa's *Guanches of Teneriffe*, and though its fortunes have waned with the wane of cochineal yet its rugged beauty is as changeless as its rocks.

We went away in the late afternoon with sunshine upon the sea and the cloud hanging still upon the mountain top. Out from the land there came flying towards us a hoopoe, a foolish and beautiful bird that had mistaken us for an island and kept winging round us in its weak, bewildered flight. And at last I saw it fall into the sea where sunset streamed upon the water and the wavelets sang a merry dirge. It was a pitiful sight but it did not prevent me having my weather-eye skinned for one of our engineers who had been trying to corner me for several days to tell me a long, obscure, and, indeed, pointless yarn about an old adventure of his in Teneriffe. It began with a visit to the Poste Restante. "Sees a letter." (Then he would nod sagaciously and spit.) "'That letter for me?' The dago hands it over. 'Hum!'—sucking his teeth—'so that's their game—all right, let 'em try it on.' No, sir, they didn't know their man." I used really to get quite confused by this story, which stunted my faculties, and when, on this afternoon, I suddenly observed the narrator approaching, I left the hoopoe to its fate and walked off.

The island was sinking down upon the horizon. Faint and fainter it lingered against the sky as though for a last and long farewell. Oh, the lure and melancholy of distant islands, of peaks glimpsed from afar, of harbour lights set in tepid straits! I have often thought that if I were enormously rich I should buy a steam-yacht and go cruising for ever amidst the islands of the middle ocean. But how many, many places I want to see! Ah, well, life is not too short for dreams, though it is too short for knowledge. I shall die before I have seen half the world, but in sudden

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moments I have felt, more surely, all the romance of wandering. I remember one evening sitting upon a tropic hillside whilst an old tramp was putting to sea in a coral stillness of sky and ocean. She slipped out, the solitary object in all that burning expanse, and the sunset swallowed her like a mist. In the immense quietude of nature, in that hour before the night, she passed secretly from me into the secret wastes of the sea. And it was as if she carried with her the very spirit of roaming, of eternal unsatisfied hope, of our errant life itself.

It was fifteen years before I was again in Teneriffe. My memory of the island had become feeble, but so vivid was my recollection of my erstwhile friend that, as I gazed upon Santa Cruz as upon an unknown town, I suddenly beheld on deck the counterpart, grown older, of the gentleman in the check suit. Quickly did I flee before him and, jumping into a boat, went forthwith on shore. It was a Sunday morning; the señoras were on their way to Church, the señors lounged in easy attitudes on every bench. I and a couple of companions hired a carriage and drove into the country, by the terraced tomato-plots, to the new cemetery which is walled as for a siege and divided into various sections according to the wealth and consequence of the deceased. Here lay in a two-storied semi-circle of above-ground vaults those who had paid six hundred and fifty pesetas to be disturbed not till the last trump, while high above them, on the side of the hill, rested temporarily those at the other end of the scale, who, as penalty for their lack of riches, could sleep there for a duration of but five years unless their relatives paid thenceforward an annual rental of some six pesetas. We belauded the beneficence of this scheme to the senile caretaker and hastened back to the town for lunch. From the Orotava we strolled to the Cathedral, which is a building of no particular merit save for some ancient internal wood-carving of ornate design,

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but outside whose entrance a tiny enclosed garden flares with the loveliest of geraniums. On returning to the ship my friend of yore had disappeared. . . .

I have been in the roadstead at Grand Canary, but I have never landed there. To begin with, the island did not look inviting from the sea, being sandy and flat, and secondly I was hard up. (I had to pawn my watch-chain for £3 when I got to Southampton.) Yes, I was hard up, but it did not stop me buying a parrot. It was a common Amazonian green parrot and it came on board in company of a plausible ruffian who offered to sell it to me for twenty-five shillings. I should have been wiser to have resisted, for it survived boisterously for upwards of twelve years, boisterously and with increasing rancour. Its name was Wilfrid, so christened by me after lengthy cogitation between that and Alfred, and though the name sounds unfitting yet it suited its peculiar form of inanity. This bird had a high opinion of me once, but that changed, and latterly I was a mere offence in its sight. Goodness only knows why! Perhaps it thought I had disregarded its feelings; I gave it away twice, but it always got returned to me on account of its behaviour. The first time I was thoroughly annoyed, jumped into a cab, and carried it straight off to a bird-fancier's near the Strand.

"I want to sell you this parrot, which is a very fine bird but is minus a claw," I said to the dealer.

"But I don't want to buy it," he remarked coldly.

"Nonsense, you must buy it—look at its plumage!"

"Very well, I'll give you a pound for the bird and the cage."

"A pound!—for a parrot like this!"

He shrugged his shoulders and I snatched up the cage and leapt back into the cab. The parrot looked very supercilious. "Drive me to London Bridge," I shouted. As I neared the station, however, I began to consider how far I lived from the railway and what a

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deuce of a business it would be getting the parrot home at all. I resolved to ask the cabman to take care of it for me and to await my instructions. He consented, wrote down his address, and I disappeared, alone and light-hearted, into the station. But, you know, one cannot rest with a parrot on one's mind and in a couple of weeks I began to repent: finally I sent a line to the cabman to meet me with the bird outside London Bridge once more. This he did with an expression of probity, informed me how greatly it had endeared itself to his wife and family, and handed it over with a stiff bill for maintenance. I took it back to the country and we became fast friends, and it even went walks with me in the garden poised on my head. In the autumn I brought it to London and presented it to a relation. At her house it gained temporary renown by biting an old lady and then laughing, but finally it fell into disgrace through irreverent behaviour at family prayers, and once more, of course, it reverted to me. Its antipathy was now marked, and that antipathy I was never able to cure. It was an odd bird, noted for its profound distrust of humanity, its inordinate and futile cunning, its fondness for unhealthy food, and for the singular fact that it used to fight in its cage with a familiar spirit. It could imitate dogs and cats to perfection and, though it couldn't or wouldn't speak properly, yet there can be no doubt that it was knowing and evil.

You might gather from all this that I have an anthropomorphic theory about animals, but I have not. I incline to Descartes' view, and it is a standing joke against me that I once argued for three days with a learned Cambridge don as to whether blackbeetles were or were not automata—a question that may be impossible to solve, though they certainly aren't beetles nor, strictly speaking, are they black. However, I simply mention this to prove that I am not a sentimentalist, and therefore I should very much like to

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discover why it was that this bird had the power of making me feel uncomfortable. Under its wary and hostile eye, that eye which had judged and found me wanting, my self-possession left me. Hang it all, no man ought to be robbed of his dignity by a parrot! . . . The terrific announcement of its death reached me in a distant land. Wilfrid, rest in peace!

It was somewhere to the south of Grand Canary, about opposite Cape Blanco—which on a calm day one espies through the haze enwrapping that viscous sea—that I was awakened one night in the year 1904 by the skipper thrusting his head in at my cabin and telling me to come on deck at once. He was very excited. I ran out and saw before me what resembled a lit-up city shining in the darkness. "It's the Russian fleet," muttered the captain in a hoarse voice. "The Russian fleet!" I echoed him, as signals flashed along the line and I thought of the Dogger Bank. Then did we look once at one another amazedly, and without further words the two of us, the grown man and the youth, watched that modern Armada pass southwards in a blaze, pass southwards till the night had gulped it all more surely than even Togo was to do. . . .

Let me speak now of those other islands, the Azores, that lie off the north-west coast of Africa. I have a special feeling for the Azores because it was on St. Michael, the largest of the group, that my eye first rested on my first journey from England. That glimpse was, as it were, my initiation to the world. We had had a nasty run across the Bay and I had been so ill that I could only just drag myself on deck in my pyjamas and loll there, wrapped in a thick coat. How miserable I was! But by-and-bye a blessed rumour, the rumour of approaching land, crept over the ship and I was as one re-born. The unknown was getting nearer! I had no vaguest idea what it would be like; my ignorance covered it with every phantasy of perfection. I believe it positively could not have

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disappointed me, for in youth there is an inward eye that sees all and sees nothing. And then, gradually, it waxed—an island of steep shores, checkered by plots of variegated vegetation like the pattern of a patch-work quilt, with palms shading up the valleys, and little white dolls'-houses perched daintily here and there. Beyond all words it was delectable to my senses, this strange new earth so full of fluttering sunshine. Our engines, which were always uncertain, suddenly gave out and we lay wallowing in the trough, comfortable at last in the unresisting movement of the boat. I was overjoyed. I felt inspired. Even in those days I had my ambitions and, as I feasted my eyes, I composed, I fancy, an eloquent opening sentence upon St. Michael.

The sentence has been forgotten, but some years ago I refreshed my memory of the island by a visit to its capital of Ponta Delgada. We had come up from the south in a heavy sea and I thought we should never make the harbour. We rolled till we could roll no more and through my port I caught flying impressions of sky and land and foaming water. I had not risen for breakfast and the steward had beguiled my tedium by a praiseworthy description, accompanied by dumb show, of how he had once waited upon Royalty. But with the slower pulsing of our engines I scrambled on deck, and, behold, there we lay before the town, heaving viciously, while a pilot-boat battled out towards us, lost every second in the hollows of the mountainous waves. It was an inspiring sight in the fresh morning, this spectacle of man's victorious intrepidity, and I stood there transfixed. The island shone out bravely, with wind shadows upon the distant pasturage, where, beyond the town, a swelling upland sloped with brown-green cultivation on the rise. A very different view of St. Michael to my first! Warily the pitching tug beat seaward until, finally, she edged round upon our weather beam and

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put her pilot on board. Within an hour, such is the resilient buoyancy of mankind, our captain was fishing over the side in the smooth water of the locked harbour.

I went on shore, but it was one of those visits so circumscribed by time that I can definitely recall little of the place save an old archway through which sunshine rayed into a narrow street. But then memory is a queer thing and perhaps mine only needs a jog. I daresay my other self knows all about Ponta Delgada; I think it must, for it keeps whispering half-recollections to my brain and from them I reconstruct a typical Portuguese town. I say "typical" because, though I have never been in Portugal, I feel convinced Portugal must be like that. This air of mouching indifference is so thoroughly characteristic of the race. I longed to get out into the country, on to that upland, but it was impossible. There I should have found not Portugal but the Azores, and, after all, if you go to the Azores it is the Azores you want to see. As it was, I returned, chastened, to the ship. My wish had been but partially satisfied and, moreover, it looked as if we had a bad future before us: a "dusting" to the north appeared inevitable and I was filled with foreboding. But the seas had miraculously abated and, skirting St. Michael in the dark, we went towards England in a winter peace.

They may grow bananas in the Canaries, but they grow pineapples in the Azores, and, if for this alone, I should always think kindly of these small islands lying out in the grim Atlantic. There is a tropical suggestion about pineapples, a suggestion of the sun, which you lose in the leafy banana-groves. But I have so many reasons for my affection! I remember yet how moved I felt when, travelling from the Indies, I spied the grey rock of Flores through the fog. There it reared its bulk, the last outpost of the West, dimly erect, fronting, as ever, the full ocean. It was a

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lowering, sulky afternoon, without colour, and the land showed damp and cheerless in the uncertain light. Yes, but it was land, it was Flores—the beacon of north-going ships! No one can tell what that island has meant to the mariners of four centuries. It has brought hope, it has awakened memories, it has loosened ten thousand throats in one fierce shout of "Land!" And gravely, as with inexhaustible patience, it loomed up for an instant, melting from us like a wraith. A fine and tremendous sight—a sight never to be forgotten. . . . Hail and farewell to the Azores!

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XXIII

ON THE BANKS OF SKYE

TWENTY-FIVE years have passed since first, as a schoolboy, I pierced into the Highlands beyond Perth and saw the Invernesshire mountains from the moving train, and fourteen and more have gone since I bade my last farewell to Skye and left the Highlands apparently for ever. These memories belong to my impressionistic years and, as such, have the inevitable tendency to be more vivid than detailed, but they have their own strong niche in recollection and I could scarce consider this book complete without allusion to them here. It is the Western Isles that I chiefly know, Skye in particular, but, as I say, my first glimpse was of Invernesshire and its pine-clad mountains. I had gone north to visit a schoolfellow at Kingussie on the Tay, and above all else I bring to mind a ruined castle beyond the river standing on the bluff of the hill and defiled by generations of dirty sightseers. The visit, to be frank, was but a partial success—the usual result of small boys' friendships—and I have a more distinct memory of strained relations than of Highland scenery. Yet the line from Perth to Inverness is perhaps the most magnificent in the kingdom, and it is sad that both towns are so uninspiring in themselves. If I remember right, I have been in them but once apiece, Perth on this first journey north, and Inverness in later years, when I came to it direct from the Gairloch on the coast of Ross. I shall ever recall the Gairloch if it were only for its summer midges and its gorgeous sunset views over the western sea. Starting thence we coached to the head of Loch Maree, and so down its waters, and by coach again to Achnasheen

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and the railway to Inverness. I repeat, it is an unattractive town, or so it then appeared, and I was glad when we had put it behind us and were steaming along the Caledonian Canal and its chain of lochs. A great experience it was, and to me more thrilling than a drive through stark Glencoe, whose tragic history has given it an adventitious appeal and whose gloomy aspect serves to keep alive the gloomy story of the massacre. The sun shone and the dazzling sky covered the hills and forests with its receptive light. The water sparkled ahead and a perfect evening brought us to Fort William with Ben Nevis on our left and Loch Eil stretching before us. . . . But I do not know the interior of the Highlands well, those parts, remote and far, where the golden eagle breeds and the wild cat prowls, and such wanderings as I made were many years ago and could not now all be traced upon a map.

No, my more recent memories, I repeat, are of the Western Isles, and even the latest of them are beginning to get worn. But the Highlands have their own way of making you remember and he who has drunk deep of their air knows not the spirit of Lethe. Their moors and hills and lochs, their scattered waters and their magic isles hold, one and all, a spell to bind the recollection and to clear the eye. Oban is, in a sense, the gateway to the Western Highlands and, like every other Highland town I know, possesses little charm in itself. But it is nice to watch the green and white yachts in the bay and amusing to see the southerners strutting here and there in fantastic Highland costumes and with the manner of chieftains. The shops cater to this fiction and there is a kind of brazen Highland atmosphere about the place which excites the novice. But in the side-streets and on the quays the fishermen talk together and their Gaelic tongue seems full of contempt for the sham costumes and enthusiasms of the Sassenach. The character of the Highlanders

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has, indeed, nothing of the artificial about it, and the revival of the Gaelic language, which, like many other good things, had languished in the mid-nineteenth century, is much more of a natural growth than the revival of Erse, which owes its present popularity to political and literary propaganda throughout Ireland. Yes, Oban is the gateway to the Western Highlands, and the pleasantest method of going to Skye is to sail out thence through the Sound of Mull and, with vistas of melting isles on every hand, up past Ardnamurchan Point and so through Sleat Sound and the Kyle of Lochalsh to Portree. But, of course, its pleasantness depends rather upon your sailing capacity, and round Ardnamurchan, in particular, I have experienced very rough weather. A ridiculous scene comes back to me of a loud-voiced man from Paisley attempting to buoy up a shrinking youth whose only desire was to be left alone in the qualms of sickness. His leading questions and unblushing advice echoed over the ship and his graphic forecasts of what was likely to happen in a few minutes were a witness more to his eloquence than to his tact. But it was off this same old point on one occasion that I became aware of the finest Highland girl I have ever seen. I don't know when she had come on board, but there she stood, tall and slim, with the dark, disdainful features of the Celtic aristocrat, her hair unloosed to the wind and her whole body taut against the storm. A woman shows her breeding in her carriage and the poise of her head, and her firm ankles and high insteps are as much a sign of birth as the large hands, strong wrists, and small feet of a man. These, perhaps, are not important points—but they *are* points. . . . In the mild summer morns, as Oban fades from view, they used to serve delicious breakfasts of fresh herrings and baps, and, going on deck, you would feel the true western air about you upon the glittering waters. Portree, itself, is not much of a place, a steep, dingy

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little town, but it makes a good centre for an exploration of the island. The mountaineer finds in Skye an unrivalled field and the conquest of the Cuchullins in the south or the Quiraing in the north is difficult as the conquest of the Alps. I remember landing long ago, on my first visit to Skye, on that wild south-western coast and gazing about me as at some forsaken corner of the earth. A gold beam broke the sea and the inner colour of the rocks shone through their surface like warm blood shining underneath the skin of a healthy man. How uneasily, you might imagine, the spirits of a dead race haunt those outlandish crags, instilling into the Highlanders of to-day the inborn second-sight which is their boast.

But there is another method of going to Skye, and that is by train journey from Edinburgh through the waste moor of Rannoch. I accomplished this feat once—or, rather, the departure from Skye—and managed to go from the island to London with but a single mile upon the water by crossing from Kyelakin to the mainland. It is a shorter journey but a more prosaic.

The Atlantic breezes and those depressions in mid-ocean which cause the barometer to fall bring to the Western Isles an unenviable supply of summer rain. June and September are safer months than July and August, but there is never anything dependable about that West Highland weather. The wisest course is to provide yourself with oilskins and shame the elements. Storms spring up suddenly in those islanded seas and a raging wind leaps upon you from out the gullies of the hills. The tides run fast between the rocky shores and the currents are treacherous and incalculable. On the stillest day the row-boat will apparently remain becalmed as the reef rushes towards you, but when the wind springs up then, indeed, you had better make for the nearest shelter. I have been caught once off Skye

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and swept over to the mainland. I don't want to repeat that experience.

Skye, like all the Highlands, is covered with great patches of heather and walking is springy upon its uplands. It is, I believe, only the Scot who understands the true appeal of heather, real heather, I mean, not bastard heaths, and though the English often rave over it, as they do over bagpipes, kilts, and haggis, yet the emotion is with them a mere second-hand form of romance. But in the Scot the sight of the purple moors arouses a profound instinct of the soil and the latent feelings of his race. Just as he hates to hear the wild hyacinth called a bluebell, which signifies a very different flower to him, so does he hate to hear the bell-heather of the south muddled up with his own particular plant. To him the heather speaks with an abiding voice and neither day nor night upon the solitary moors finds him lonely. These are no meaningless words but a truth which it requires generations of Scottish descent to fathom and to admit. Long may heather grow on the poor but precious soil of Scotland!

When a shower of rain has left its freshness on the earth and a watery sunset is gleaming about the islands then does the sea take on an insubstantial pink and the capes float between the upper and the lower clouds. At such times the hush of the hour poises lightly over the scene and night lingers in its advance as though fearful of breaking the charm. One may sit idly by the shore and gaze upon the loveliest visions of hallucination. I remember such an evening when through the narrow kyle, with its further passage of but a hundred yards in breadth, there stole silently a huge ten-thousand tonner. Never did anything appear more incredible and never did the whole aspect of the isles glow with a more fairy-like unreality. But in a minute or so she had disappeared to the north, that steamer with her German tourists, and night, as if

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woken from her trance, began to darken the jutting points and change the transparency of the sea to ink.

The south-eastern portion of Skye is comparatively flat and existence there tends to the same quality. Boating and fishing are to be had in abundance about Broadford, but the road towards Portree is unpretentious. The best plan is to hire a bicycle and get further afield into the interior, and it is the plan that I followed. But the bird-life is not rich and it is only on the more distant rocks that the sea-fowl breed within the Western Isles. I have seen nothing in these Highland fastnesses to equal the number of gannets on the Bass Rock off the coast of Haddington, and though puffins and cormorants swim and dive about the shores of Skye they are but an insignificant feature. True, you may come upon an adder in your wanderings, but I know a hill in Surrey where you may catch adders, grass-snakes, and slow-worms on any sunny afternoon of spring. There isn't much in that. No, Skye is to be explored, rather, for its scenery, its associations, and its people. The people are always interesting and the old crones mumble like witches from their ruinous hovels, cursing the passer-by as if he typified, as well he may, that spirit of adventure which has carried so many of their sons to the United States. Yes, and carried them sadly from their isle of sea-wrack and hill-fog:

> "From the lone shieling of the misty island
> Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas—
> Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
> And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

The Highlanders are naturally a secretive race and they do not open their hearts to strangers, whose only idea is to accumulate local colour as a collector accumulates Japanese netsukes. Thousands of inane enquiries have taught them a set formula to conceal their reserve or, in alternative, a dourness that is more telling than words. But we had some Highland

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servants in our Border home and I long since came to recognize their quick temper and their loyalty. Our old washerwoman, who was a little mad, lived in a world of Celtic dreams and was frequently oblivious to all questions, but our two Highland nurses were proud and superior women who would have made their way anywhere. They spoke, as, indeed, do all Highlanders, with a wonderfully pure English accent through their Celtic intonation, but their Gaelic sounded to us in these early years like the spitting of infuriated geese. On the Highland roads you meet with patrician types of men and women, black-browed and haughty, but it is vain to try to fathom their thoughts. They despise you and, however civil they may be, you feel that they despise you.

One morning of August, when a Scotch mist enveloped all the seascape in its chill blanket, my sister and I descended the narrow streets to Portree Harbour and went on board a tiny steamer bound for the outer Hebrides and the western coast of Skye. We rolled northward along the steep and drizzling shores with the green seas hummocky about us and the dapple of the spray smiting salt upon our faces above the freshness of the rain. Through Raasay Sound we drove, skirting to the north, and then outward across the Little Minch for Uist and the islands of the rimmed west. I have no note of our several landfalls, but I see again those strange and barren shores, the bearded men striding over the heather'd rocks, the crofters' huts whose peat-fires ascended spirally in the brightened day, and I feel again the untrammelled air of the boundaries. Our gaunt skipper, with his carroty hair, exhibited a shy speechlessness at lunch in the stuffy little saloon, which gave the meal the aspect of a funereal repast. The boat rocked and dipped to the waves and the smell of vegetables and oil was hardly suitable to a squeamish stomach. I was not sorry to lie down for a time, but

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in the late afternoon we had completed our half-circle and made Dunvegan at the hour of sunset. The Castle, like a monument of forgotten chivalry, stands upon a rock facing the sea and from its battlements the set of the sun blazes upon streaming channels and distant reefs. A noble grey old Castle it is, with eight hundred years of history in its dim chambers and the whisper of the past murmuring about its walls as the tide murmurs within its dungeons. In the village at its foot a devotee of Highland bibliography showed me his collection of rare Celtic literature and many years later I read with satisfaction that his enthusiasm had blossomed into a valuable work on the subject. The Macleods still reign at Dunvegan, while the Macdonalds, once Shepherds of the Isles, still hold sway in Armadale. So do the Highland traditions outlast the changes of the years.

It was on our journey back from Dunvegan to Portree that, walking across the odorous dusk of northern Skye, we overtook an American and his wife (we had first met them at the inn) who had travelled all the way from Washington to taste the flavour of the Highlands. We were glad to greet them again, as they had caught our original fancy by their delight in eating the crumb of steamy new bread, and it was now, when we had struck out across country and had left the sea behind us for the stone dykes of the farms, that we overtook them and continued in their company. The husband and I fell to talking of Abraham Lincoln and he described to me the dawn breaking over his beloved Potomac and the glories of camping out upon the river. Whilst we all four of us trudged along the stars began to appear and the smell of the heather came sugar'd and soft from off the moors. What a walk it was, and all the finer for having this impromptu air about it! These Americans were charming and sympathetic people, he from the South, she from the North, and I made a point of renewing our

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acquaintanceship in England. But America swallowed them in due course, letters tailed off, and I suppose I shall never see them again. Such meetings with people from far countries or in far countries often end like that and the recollection of a hundred personalities, glimpsed and lost, remains vaguely at the back of memory. Of course, the chances of life are hopelessly casual and there must be many unknown friends that will never meet. That does not matter so much, but walking down the streets of cities the sight of beautiful women saddens one in its very pleasure. They are not for you, and in innumerable other cities they are passing by, these women, warm and radiant—and not for you. Every young man has, at times, thought with a sudden gasp that somewhere, unknown to him, there dwells a girl whose lips are to be his and whose eyes will answer his eyes tremblingly; and, while I, too, have had such fancies, almost more have I been haunted by the thought of all those other multitudes. One creates in one's mind a picture of Ohio farms, of Burmese groves, of South Sea beaches, and from each frame there smiles enigmatically upon you a tender woman of your dreams. So slip the years of youth from out the fingers of reluctant time.

Let us leave Skye for a moment and to the east of Mull, that island further south, in whose bay of Tobermorey the sunken Spanish galleon lies mud-bound for ever, watch two famous isles emerge like dots upon the inner water—Staffa, with its caves into which the restless sea washes from year to year, Iona, serene and sacred cradle of our primitive Christianity. Their far renown requires no commentary from me, and I would rather describe their atmosphere than their appearance. The reverberating chambers of Staffa touch one as might the lonely treasures of some deep ocean cave, and as you approach the deserted islet you feel that its splendours are a thing apart, accessible only to the presence and to the thoughts of some

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strange sea-race. As for Iona, it is peaceful as an ancient graveyard or as the sleep-place of some passionate hope long stilled. No desecration can touch it now and the green stone of its ruins, like the rosy stone of Lindisfarne, has mellowed into ageless slumber. A thin and delicate air hovers about Iona and in its attenuated emotion one is conscious of the vast gap dividing us from the incomprehensible ideals of its Monkish founders. Both Staffa and Iona elude our spirit of continuity. . . .

The west of Scotland produces a very wise and confidential type of waiter and in places as far apart as Rothesay and Skye I have had many an hour beguiled by their schemes and reminiscences. They are the product of Glasgow rather than Edinburgh (and if Edinburgh be beautiful, give me Glasgow for stark human interest !), and they represent the independence of the Scottish character at almost its completest. You know where you are with the Scot of this kind—not with the Gael, of course—and their polite interest in you has none of the obsequiousness of that dreadful breed of English waiter whose very appearance has been its own undoing. I must say I have never discovered in England the waiter of Shaw's imagination : in some of the out-of-the-way Midland inns, it is true, there lingers a paternal and prehistoric type, but I am thinking more of the man who makes the Thames-side hideous. Well, it is not a discussion particularly worthy of pursuit ; yet I have heard so much shrewd wisdom in the mouths of Scottish waiters and so much dreariness in the mouths of their English brothers that the point is worth a mention here.

Martin and Pennant are the classic earlier authorities on Skye and the Western Isles, but the most entertaining book ever devoted to the subject is Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides.* And it is all the more satisfying because it was written before

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the rage for self-conscious romanticism had invaded the eighteenth century and when remarks upon scenery were almost entirely conventional. The Romantic Revival, with its theory of the Perfectibility of Man and its over-insistence on the emotions is, with the Reformation, responsible for all the social delirium of the present—though I suppose things are what they are because mankind is what it is—and has much to answer for both in good and bad. The eighteenth century was hard, but it was sensible, and though (to revert to our point) neither Johnson nor Boswell cared a rap about the wilderness yet they were insatiably curious as to people and customs and the book is sheer comedy from start to finish. Another volume on Skye worth reading is Alexander Smith's *A Summer in Skye*, a work steeped in Victorian sentiment but not unpleasing—of its type. In general, the literature on the Isles and on the Highlands is vitiated by false sentiment and an unhistoric conception of the past. The mystic tinge of the Celtic character which found, or did not find, its grandiloquent echoes in the sombre pages of Ossian, is still utterly divorced from southern gaiety, and the narrow loyalty of the Celt is still mingled, as it always has been, with deep introspection. The Highland character is admirable in its power to endure, in its pride, in its hospitality, and in its passionate memory, but it is revengeful and uncertain and its universal romanticism is a poor soil for individual distinction of high order.

The social problem of the Highlands is the problem of poverty—poverty of soil, poverty of population, poverty of money. The two last hang upon the first and perhaps nothing can remedy the cause. Scott's novels opened the Highlands to the inquisitive of all countries and such wealth as they now possess has come from outside. The great chieftains, the heads of clans, with their resounding names and valueless acres, can marry into rich southern families and solve their

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problem once and for all, but the mass of the population is reduced to living off the foreigner from hand to mouth. It is an extraordinary thing that the Highlanders should have retained their exclusive dignity under these conditions, but true it is, nevertheless, that they are the least fawning nation in the world although existing directly and tirelessly on others. The clan system, which survives yet in its political disruption, is no doubt largely responsible for this, but, of course, the clan system is, in itself, only a symptom of the character of the people. Narrowest of Nonconformists or straitest of Catholics, radical at heart, attached to their homes with an intensity of feeling that outlasts despair, they know nothing but the extreme emotions. If only the Highlands had been rich in themselves what developments might we not have witnessed in this sturdy and remarkable race! And, yet, I don't know; the genius of the Celt appears inimical to the creative side of government, and its fervour is, perhaps, bound up with its misfortunes. I am not sure, because one can create any philosophy of history from the facts, but I do have my doubts. They may be settled one day.

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XXIV

TO THE AUSTRIAN DOLOMITES

ONCE upon a time, and a long time ago it is fast becoming, I was ordered by a doctor to go to Tarasp, on the south-eastern frontier of Switzerland, for the taking of certain baths. There being nothing for it but to obey, I forthwith found a friend ready to accompany me and started off. We crossed to France and, running slantwise through her land, found ourselves in Basle station on the following morning. It is a large station full of refreshment rooms and perpetually bewildered travellers and I need squander no words on it. We had to wait in Basle some hours and naturally we did what everyone else does, we hired a carriage and drove down to the Rhine to view the city on its banks, which, from the centre of the bridge, looks like a medieval town built above the ice-cold river. But Basle is not much of a place and we were both glad when midday arrived and the train steamed out towards the high valley of Davos Platz. The ascent is tortuous and prolonged and the lowland fields give way little by little to woods of pine, while the summer heat changes gradually into a mountain chillness. One thing amused me considerably—the grotesque English of the official warnings in the compartments. Do you mean to tell me that the whole Swiss Government couldn't find an accurate translator for so elementary a piece of work? The fact is, I suppose, that plenty of people think of writing to the Administration but no one does write, and so the Government continues to pat itself on the back and say what a fine fellow it is!

We reached Davos in the late afternoon, a village of hotels and consumptive-châlets, with a green and

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flowery valley beneath and snowy peaks around, a spot beautiful in itself but ruined for the healthy by the ominous reminder of sickness in the wan figures stretched on balconies and in the printed notices about expectoration. The keen, pure air comes brimming off the hills and it is sad to think that this home of germless life should too often be the grave of those contaminated by cities and the stifling foulness of the plains.

Sunday we spent at Davos and on the Monday morning, very early, we repaired to the starting-place of the coach which was to carry us over the Flüella Pass and down along the valley of the Inn to Tarasp, almost at the Austrian frontier. The day was fine and the coach galloped off for its steep ascent in the coruscation of the July morn. Soon the gallop was a trot and soon the trot a straining walk as we wound upwards over the Alpine road, that road which, in the wisdom of the Government, had never seen a motor or heard the beat of an engine, until we gained the crest at 7,838 feet, where snow was piled up six feet on either side the track and where the air was bitter beneath the blazing sun. There is a little hostel at the top of the pass in which they provide you with soup and other food, and there we went stamping to and fro to warm our numbed extremities. Then, to the sighing of the brakes, we passed downwards to Süs and so through woods above the river and into the close vale of the Inn. We landed at Tarasp just in time for dinner.

In those days it was a place almost entirely patronized by stout Germans who endeavoured to grow thin —I may observe that I had no such purpose in view— by taking medicinal baths and eating intemperately. I have never seen a more disgusting sight than the long table of our hotel during the progress of a meal. As soon as the waiters appeared at the top with a fresh dish every eye was turned in their direction and every

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face assumed a calculating expression as much as to say, "How many seconds can I keep him when he comes to me?" That depended, I am sorry to say, on the amount left in the dish, and it is no exaggeration to aver that the waiters spent most of their time fetching new supplies. Opposite us there sat two of the only other Britishers in the hotel in the shape of a curate of the Church of England and a Presbyterian minister of the Church of Scotland. The one had been sent out by a society to take the summer services in the minute Chapel, the other was on his annual jaunt to the Continent. We were regaled at our first meal by a powerful dissertation of the curate's anent the various Creeds, and I remember distinctly that he wound up by expressing a preference for one of them (which one, I forget) because it displayed so convincingly "The beauty of the Trinity." As he said these words he looked slyly round, though the Scotsman, I must admit, appeared wholly unmoved. I got to know both men afterwards and, of the two, preferred the curate. He was rather a foolish curate and had little conversation outside the subjects of prayer and the iniquity of bicycling on Sunday, but he was an ingenuous youth, whereas the Scot was hardheaded and untouched by enthusiasms of any kind. However, they were not such desperately uncommon types and I may well leave them.

We explored Tarasp the next day and came to the speedy conclusion that it was dismal. One or two big hotels along the valley, a village of raw newness a mile further on, the foaming Inn, and hills that shut out the sky—that is Tarasp. It is unbearably hot but it is not the heat that makes you feel you cannot breathe. No, it is the sense of being in a trap, from which not even hillside walks can release you. Each day we watched the coach start for the Austrian frontier as prisoners watch the door open for the fortunate few, and about the fifth, my friend, suddenly realizing

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that he could endure it no longer, and having, indeed, nothing to detain him, left in jubilation to join his family in the Dolomites. I was alone with the curate, the minister, and the gormandizing Germans!

Yes, I was alone and doomed, apparently, to a month of tepid, ærated baths. I did my best to stand it, and though I could not escape from the German couples mooning about the paths arm-in-arm like animals fattening in a pen, or hanging over the swing-bridge and gazing into the water lost in a sentimental trance,yet, on occasion, I would lock myself in my room and lie on my bed and read Balzac. But the situation was really too appalling. I had already been up to see the Swiss doctor at the village, a doctor who practised in Berne during the winter and had sufficient philosophy to regard his summer months at Tarasp as a semi-holiday, and he had put me under the usual régime. But after a week of loneliness I rushed into his room one afternoon in a state of breathless agitation and announced that my friend was ill and that I must rejoin him at once. It was a lie and he gave me one unmasking glance, but that didn't matter for the next morning I was on the coach and almost beside myself with joy. You don't know and I could never explain to you my emotions during that journey. As the coach crept up the rise and hated Tarasp disappeared from view, I could have given a war-whoop. The country ahead seemed to open welcoming arms to me and I felt like shouting in the deep gladness of my heart. It was about two in the afternoon when we reached the Austrian frontier, which is situated beyond a bridge of the Inn by the edge of a forest. I was thankful to leave Switzerland behind, yes, quite apart from Tarasp, I was thankful. It is a country of toadynig hotel-keepers and picturesquely unconvincing peasants and it hasn't even got a language of its own. The Swiss are patriots, no doubt, but their patriotism is dissipated over three tongues and I don't know how

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many patois, and as their main business is to please moneyed foreigners it is difficult to get at the basis of the national conscience. A tame, flattering race, you would judge, and yet it has its own passionate love of freedom and harbours exiles that England, herself, would scarcely harbour. Is not Geneva the very centre of anarchic internationalism? What is one to think of the Swiss, whose industry is wonderful, whose self-control admirable, and whose tout ensemble most uninviting; and what is one to think of Switzerland, with its peerless lakes and mountains and its towns of vulgar mediocrity? Perhaps I miss the real soul of the country and its people by not being an Alpine climber. I have never had any leanings that way and I am quite unable to share the austere ecstasy of its devotees. Yet I have met many climbers and I think I do understand why it is that the recluse type of brain of a Leslie Stephen can gather refreshment and strength from the solitude of the High Alps. But I am not of that type myself.

I find that all my memory has grown dim in the swirl of my emotions and I could no more fill in the details of this day than the details of some lingering dream. I just remember how we scampered downhill to another valley with a village at its foot and how we turned sharp to the right by a lakeside on a plain. Another coach gave me other companions, and some delightful Austrians, a mother and two daughters, spoke to me of far England with a friendliness very suitable to my mood. And then, at last, we got to that town where the side-line starts for Meran and Botzen, and there I had to preserve myself in patience till the evening train. Oh, that wait, which to my strung longing was like eternity, and, oh, that cork wood, above, where I tried to make the minutes pass! Words, which are vague things at best, can no more depict them than they can depict the first true kiss or the first sight of a tropic isle.

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Evening fell parched upon my spirit as the train pulled out at snail's pace to my dumb cries of speed. I leant from the window and saw the sunset flare and die away and saw the glittering lights of dark Meran whose vineyard-scented air filled all the warmth and silence of the night. And so, very late, about the middle hours, to Botzen, which lies in a cup of hills at the confluence of the Talfer and the Eisak, and which, in the hushed quiet of a July night, was still reeking of the day's fierce heat. I managed to discover an hotel and to arrange for a carriage to take me up to Karersee at four in the morning. Then I flung myself on the mattress and tossed restlessly and awaited the call.

It was nipping when I came downstairs and I wrapped myself in coat and rug and told the driver to make what pace he could. The last lap had begun, the last lap, and I put my watch resolutely back in my pocket, after consulting it three times in as many minutes, and swore that I would not look at it again for at least an hour. I was as good as my word and in the firmness of my resolve the time went quicker. It was yet twilight as we rattled through the streets and the stars still held the sky above the low faint primrose of the dawning east. But soon we were out beyond the town, with the world narrowing to the broadening day and woods shutting in the road by which a rushing stream tumbled and gurgled on its stony course. An occasional shrine, cut into the bank, showed through its glass-front the sacred images and votive offerings of the Faithful, and an occasional figure of the Redeemer hung, bleeding and ghastly, from its wayside Cross. And ever before us the serrated Dolomites, mauve and airy in the distance, soared like an impossible goal on the horizon. But foot by foot we were mounting nearer and minute by minute they seemed to grow and take on substance in the rising light. And in due time all was accomplished, and at

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nine o'clock, five hours after my departure, we drew rein at the summit of the Karersee and I alighted. My friends had finished breakfast and were setting out for the hill. I ran to greet them with the ineffable feeling of one returned from the dead. . . . How can I tell what happened? My excitement had been too profound: something seemed to snap in my head and life was presently darkened. Its joy had turned to poison and through a crack in the universe another world, troubled and terrible, lay coiled about the roots of the dying earth. That, which had been so sweet, had become more bitter on the instant than gall and wormwood and I had to wait for time to rebuild the delicate balance.

But to put this aside, let me speak of the Karersee itself. Our hotel was almost on the top of the pass and great fields, dense in clover and flowers, sloped towards the fantastic peaks of Rosengarten and the range of the Dolomites. Looking from my upper window a predominant colour-note spread scarlet or blue upon the fields and every six or seven days it would change completely as one flower waned and another attained its prime. High on these swelling meadows, where the grass-land met the rock, gentians were scattered on the hill and were the sure requital of a stiff morning's climb. Mountain paths carried one round the sheer side of the cliff into regions where the yodling of cowherds would sound far in the still air and an occasional hawk shoot out from the massy upper rocks. The valley buildings seemed like painted toys on a green board and the waters of the shallow Karersee gleamed through their fringe of pine trees like a sheet of tin.

But many a day we spent in idle rest below or reclining on the rooted margin of the lake and skimming stones. At eve the cows streamed homewards with their tinkling bells and we would stroll down the valley and watch the tennis-players and the more

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fashionable life of the other inn. A dawdling existence of light breakfasts out of doors and of suppers made delicious by the rarest salads I have ever tasted and by tumblers of cool milk! Sometimes a few sturdy pedestrians would appear pushing upwards through the woods and would be gone without a halt, their eyes fixed steadily ahead. The province of Tirol is a favourite centre, not alone for professional mountaineers, but for those who scorn the mere breaking of records and only want to stretch their legs on rough but accessible paths. Our own countrymen are well to the fore in this meretorious company. As long ago as 1864 Gilbert and Churchill produced their *Dolomite Mountains*, setting, I suppose, a craze that has never waned and which, in the splendour of the country, is never likely to wane. . . . As evening deepened the jagged upper peaks took on tints of rose and purple and lit from one expiring sun the fire as of another. The goblin Dolomites flushed and danced above the devouring night and then, growing pale with fear, faded and fled into the shadows.

From the top of the Karersee Pass, 5,715 feet above the sea, one looks down with one's inward eye upon Italy and the Venetian plain. I used to imagine myself borrowing a rücksack and a stick and wandering off along that winding road, seeking food at stray farm-houses and sleeping in the open, until, at length, I should debouch upon north Italy and her villages. Yes, jolly enough in thought, but, perhaps, disappointing in reality. I have not seen much of Italy, but what I have seen has not tempted me. The country is unattractive and her antiquities are almost too endless. I feel like Heine, who, in the matchless *Reisebilder*, no sooner arrives in Rome, than he all but abandons description for dialogue. The history of the medieval states and cities bores me in its exasperating complexity and even the Risorgimento, in spite of Meredith and Trevelyan, leaves me indifferent.

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It was a nineteenth-century affair and it has played its part. As a matter of truth, I prefer Victor Emmanuel and Cavour to Mazzini and Garibaldi—a fact that puts me out of court at once. Talking of Victor Emmanuel and Rome, I have to confess that the inchoate and colossal Memorial to him in the capital attracted me more than anything else I saw there save some glimpses of the parks. That's a shameful admission. But there are many things I am not capable of appreciating. The Vatican, for me, resembles a huge block of tenements and St. Peter's is too hopelessly well-preserved: a Renaissance statue is not improved by looking as much like a new pin as a Rodin. And as for the Roman remains, I can only say that I sat an hour in the Forum thinking it was the Coliseum! Now I know why Dostoievsky spent his time in Rome reading Victor Hugo in a café. Yes, it was as a modern city that Rome interested me, not as an ancient, and the Romans, themselves, interested me because they were the only disagreeable and boorish Italians I have ever met. I have heard others make the same remark. The average Italian—and I have known a good many, both men and women—is a particularly well-bred person and, in some respects, more English in outlook and, therefore, more sympathetic to the English, than any other European. But the Romans—they are merely rude! I never want to see them or their city again. Allow me to apologise for this digression. . . .

The only outward agitation of my stay in the Pass—inwardly I was like a kettle that has boiled over, like a traveller who has lost his road—was my discovery, as I was going to bed one night, that a manuscript of mine (not this one!), was missing from my room. I raised an alarm, the house was roused, a search was instituted, and the dustbin yielded up the treasure! If I didn't gain credit as an author, I gained resentment as a madman. In future every scrap of

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paper I tore up was collected by the housemaid and deposited on the table—but I rewarded her, finally, with a basin which I had chipped and for which I had to pay five kroner to my extreme indignation.

All things come to an end and in spite of the pathetic glances of the head-waiter (who bore a singular and dignified resemblance to Cardinal Richelieu), in spite of the conversation of his assistant, who used to tell me how, when the season was over, he meant to take a fortnight's walking-tour amongst the hills before descending to Italy, we decided to return to Botzen and try another hill-resort of which we had heard. I wish we had made no such decision; this new place, named Klobenstein and reached from the city by a rack-and-pinion railway, was of all places on earth the most gruesomely depressing and intolerable. A vast crucified Christ, in the hue and realistic pose of agony, faced the hotel more like a menace than a blessing above the sweep of the valley. But, indeed, the upper land of Tirol is hag-ridden by the sombre, helpless figure of the suffering Lord. The air seems tainted by His blood and the compassionate Redeemer is lost for one in the dying Saint. Austria, of course, is, with Ireland, the most Catholic country in Europe, and the province of Tirol her most Catholic province —ultramontanism made manifest without the hint of a question. Here, in the mountains, the joyousness of the Catholic Faith has veered into the blight of a fanatical renunciation. The very fields have their dead Christs upon their edge and the roads are dreadful with shrines and effigies devoted not to hope but to despair.

In writing these words I should repeat, in fairness, how at that period I was deeply disturbed by certain events and how the usual significance of things had lost its hold to some extent. This nightmare world of mine swallowed, like a mist, the outlines of the earth, and I saw all through the distorted eyes of a cold

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and bewildered misery. I think nearly everyone has known such phases and wants only to forget. I, too, want to forget; indeed, I had forgotten for years, till now, remembering that place, the recollection is made vivid again in those figures of the tortured Christ.

The country was monotonous, without personality, and on those dusty lanes you would never have guessed you were some thousands of feet above the near-by Botzen. A woodland path used to bring me to a large field of standing corn, into which I would plunge as into a safe refuge. It was alive with grasshoppers, big nearly as locusts and of the green-yellow colour of the ripening stalks. They hopped and chirped and eat as though existence were one careless summer (O wise La Fontaine!) and the universe had been created solely for them. How changed their key if the Continent had not long since been denuded of small birds by the rapacious energy of everyone who can borrow a gun! I sometimes wonder how Dresser managed to get the materials for his work on European ornithology; certainly through no fault of the few million Continental sportsmen.

We tarried in the mountains for several weeks. I soon perceived that it wasn't only my spirits that were affected and I resolved to break the spell for two of us, at least, were it only for a day. Down we went to Botzen, we two, and had a good lunch, with a sparkling German wine, on the verandah of the best restaurant. A walk round Botzen, with its railway running through the valley towards the south and all its vines in terraces upon the hills, brought new life to us both. Ah, that *is* a countryside! The very people seem to smile at one in genuine friendliness. There is a gaiety and suave charm about the Austrians that transport you at once to Viennese cafés and laughing crowds and enable you to grasp how it is they produce men like Lehar and Schnitzler, the masters of light opera and light dialogue. But what is surprising is to hear this

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race of fine women and handsome men speak in the harsh German of the Teutons. They ought to have a mercurial language of their own, a language to knit their nationality (especially now that they are so weak), a language to echo their lovemaking and their songs. The most magnificent-looking men in Europe are Austrians, and as for the women, they have figures like angels and eyes like beaming stars. The race is, indeed, different from the German.

Near Botzen, on the top of a conical and detached hill up the road to the Karersee, there stand the remains of one of those old castles built to outvie the centuries and whose only purpose now is to call back the vanished world of the Middle Ages. A different world, in truth, and so hidden under the generalities and glamour of history that the Holy Roman Empire appears to consist of nothing but monks, troubadours, and robber barons. The great families flourish and decay yet their memory remains intact in the monuments of Churches and the annals of National Archives; but the poor here, as in England, the poor who survive for ever, can hardly count back three generations and will themselves be forgotten in a few years. Venerable habitations like this, shells of faded pomp, tend to fill me with a certain ironic emotion at that pride which still knew that all must perish and be dust and all rise again at the last trump to be judged equally for damnation or eternal life. In those days faith was so strong and logic so very weak.

We had to return uphill by the evening train and no sooner had we arrived than the pall descended as heavy as before. Now I see why it is that primitive people dread the mountains and consider them the home of evil demons. I tried to reason myself out of the horror that encompassed me but I could not shake it off. The figure of the Crucified hung limp from the nails and a miasma of futile pain seemed to emanate from the paroxysm of that wooden image. I thought

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of the fields bordered by their dead Christs and of the roads thick with shrines where all the unhappiness of a believing population is concentrated in unavailing prayers and Calvinistic gloom. The burden of their sorrow and their tears weighs mockingly upon the empty gaudiness, and how can grief be washed free by one from whose face physical torment has obliterated all pity and all thought for the lowly and aching heart? . . . I was not well and I wanted to escape into another kind of existence where the air was untainted and everything revolved without a visible God, whose victory over death seemed more like the final triumph of corruption. I told my friends that I would leave them and travel beforehand into Germany, and they, on their part, understood and let me go. And so it came about that I went down to Botzen for the last time.

I started thence next day as an advance-guard to prepare a lodging for us all in Munich. It was not an exciting journey and the glimpses I caught of Brixen and Innsbrück caused me no thrill. And as to Munich itself, this capital of Bavaria and show-town of all south Germany, I felt so little inclination to explore it that I spent most of my time in a small bedroom of a small hotel reading such English papers as I could procure. I went, certainly, to the famous lake and to the Pinakothek with its varnished Reubenses and its Altdorfers, but the first only suggested draughts of iced Munich beer and the second fatigued me immeasurably, as do all picture-galleries. I was glad when my friends arrived and gladder still when, a few days later, we boarded the west-bound train and set forward once more for the French frontier.

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XXV

WINTER IN RHODESIA

AS the north train slips out of Cape Town and Table Bay gleams and fades before you for the last time you cannot but be conscious of relief. The free, wide earth lies ahead and the close life of cities is forgotten like some evil recollection that dies in the morning. There is no such thing as quick travelling in South Africa and the leisurely stride of the train seems proper to the leisurely great changes of the countryside. Through heathlands and vineyards and barren spaces, with grey-blue ranges undulating afar and rivers foaming through their osier beds, you gain the entrance to the Hex Valley and climb up, in the darkening air, between its mountain parapets. The heavy panting of the engine is the last sound you hear that night but on the morrow you awake to a very different scene. The waste and monotonous Karroo, sprinkled with white farmsteadings and outlined by ridged kopjes, stretches on either side throughout a weary day. Only when evening falls and the hills take on the African glow and the heath is effaced do you feel a touch of that fascination which, to those who know it, is its mysterious spell. In any one of these lonely houses might *The Story of an African Farm* have found its setting.

It is after sundown that you approach Kimberley, whose putty-coloured diamond dumps resemble in the uncertain light the excrescences of some hideous disease. They give you dinner in the station there and you have time for one swift glimpse of the town. It was dark when I trod its streets but I conceived of it as a place without personality and I have no desire to visit it by daylight. I.D.B. gentlemen, millionaires, and

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chorus-girls have been known to exhibit great emotion in Kimberley, exclaiming, no doubt, in the words of Mrs. Blimber (apropos of the Classics), "What a world of honey have we here!", but those of us to whom it can offer no kind of financial hope are conscious of nothing more unusual than a longing to escape. At least, I take it that I am not an exception. . . . After a halt of some few hours the train pulls out again with its diminished load, the wise traveller composes himself to sleep, and morning greets you upon the border town of Mafeking. It is not an impressive place and reminds one of some western American mining settlement on the skirts of beyond. And, indeed, it *is* an outpost, for shortly after leaving Mafeking you are over the boundary of the Colony and into Bechuanaland.

The country opens to a rolling park-ground, rich in high yellowing grass and sprinkled with trees. For hour after hour this soothing and restful landscape spreads unchanged before the loitering train. It satisfies one's innermost sense of what is fit with its exact likeness to the preconceived idea. An occasional kraal of brown circular huts perched upon some low hillside, an occasional settlement of white men along the line are the only human evidences. It is a deserted but not a desert country, and if it had but springs it would be one of the vast grazing centres of the continent. In the afternoon the dust increases, a cloud of it hangs about you, and in spite of every precaution of shut door and window, in spite of damp towels suspended over the openings, the Kalahari covers the cushions and enters everywhere. My God, what a dust! Your inside is coated and each breath you inhale tastes dry and acrid on the tongue. But in the evening you run out of this patch and the twilight coolness descends upon you with a double blessing.

I remember that early night in Bechuanaland. At

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Mahalapye the creepers formed a trellis along the cottages of the railwaymen and the stoked-up fires of the engines in the distant shed threw red glares upon the sky. We walked up and down the line, the unknown land expanding vaguely about us, the feel of the dusk lying softly on the still air. Suddenly our relief-engine came belching out of the forest like some fiery beast of the jungle. I stood well up the track and watched her clanging round the curve while in front of me the laughing passengers strolled to and fro along their headless train. Out of all the sights of Africa that is the one most indelibly engraved upon my imagination. A mere episode of a journey, I see it as an epitome of man's victory and of man's ineptitude, of his unconscious romanticism and of the mighty forces of the waste.

And so night reigned once more and when day broke we were out of Khama's country and had entered Rhodesia. It was quite early when I alighted at Bulawayo, but in that stir and flutter the peaceful, wild indolence of Bechuanaland appeared infinitely remote. Where was Lobatsi now, where Palapye with its karosses spread out beneath the lamps? No, Bulawayo is nothing if it is not modern. One of the smallest of the cities of Africa, having, in truth, scarce 8,000 inhabitants all told, it is yet designed upon a grandiose scale and suggests the skeleton of a large town. Its streets are immensely wide and its scattered suburbs slant far away in long vistas of avenues. Bulawayo lies in a plain covered with thorny mimosa bushes, mopani trees, and rough grass. It is a sandy and arid plain and the pumping windmills of the town point to its lack of water. It is rather strange that so young a place should have acquired already so solid an aspect, even though the solidity be, as it were, skin-deep and decidedly haphazard. The fine streets tail off sadly into shacks and some of the most permanent-looking buildings wear a forlorn and surprised

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expression as if they had been put there under false pretences and objected strongly to their ignominious neighbours. As a centre of diverging traffic Bulawayo has its full share of visitors and big hotels have sprung up over the little township. The best and the biggest of these is the Grand which bars the head of Main Street, that pride of all good citizens. And in its own way it is worth their pride. Straight and wide and flat it cuts through the town on the model of a famous Parisian thoroughfare. Here you can shop, hire motors or rickshaws, and, in general, comport yourself as though you were a man of means. A person of a rather mordant humour bade me observe in Main Street two monuments and asked me whether I did not see, in my mind's eye, an invisible third. I stared blankly at him.

"Notice," he said, "that the first monument is one to the men who fell in the Rebellion of '96, and that the second is a statue of Cecil Rhodes. Now I, myself, maintain that these monuments are in reality numbers two and three and that the first, the missing one, should be a statue to a man like Dr. Moffat. This, you gather, would make the symbol of the advance of civilization complete—first, the Missionary, then the Pioneer Column, and then the Exploiter. . . . Not that Rhodes was your true exploiter at all," he hastened to add; "you mustn't take me too literally. In fact, if Rhodes had only lived——"

If Rhodes had only lived—how often have I heard those words in Rhodesia! There is no one so powerful in this world as the man whose materialism has a passionately idealistic basis. If Rhodes had only lived—it is the excuse for every failure, for every Utopian dream. And probably it *would* have been a different country if he had lived, though I rather imagine that death has not been Rhodesia's chiefest foe. In the Cape the Colossus appears to be almost forgotten, here he is touchingly remembered. If he would but rouse

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himself and stretch out his hand the very veld would smile! But a new generation is springing up, the Jew is getting a grip upon the country, and the old settlers are dying out. At long last no man is indispensable.

My most agreeable hours in Bulawayo were spent in the Club—about as comfortable a club as I have ever entered. Its supporters are mining men, farmers, and so on, the best of hospitable good fellows. Moreover, there is an excellent cellar and an excellent library. I found that the conversation turned, usually, into the three channels of cattle, big game, and the Chartered Company. Cattle and big game are popular, the Chartered Company is not. It is almost as unpopular as the Union and its position is sufficiently anomalous to make the reason plain. You cannot, so to speak, serve God and Mammon. But I shall keep clear of politics.

On the sunny winter days one could sip one's four o'clock tea outside on the stone balcony half-hidden from the street by a climbing creeper. Only a passing cart or the siren-like cries of the boys selling the afternoon "Special" broke the quiet. In truth, the mid-winter of Bulawayo is hard to beat. Cool nights and cloudless days succeed one another through long-drawn weeks and you dwell as in some charmed circle of the sky. The altitude of nearly 4,500 feet tempers the warmth and before the sun has mounted too high a walk over the withered veld is a refreshment. But towards the close of winter the weather is apt to change and the sky to be overcast. You experience days of windy cold and sit cowering before log fires. Then again comes another change when torrid heat smites upon the town and farmers gaze anxiously skyward for portents of the first rains. So are the changes of the year fulfilled.

Bulawayo is not a town that stands much exploration. It has a Library and a Museum, a Park and a Zoo, but they are of only mediocre interest. The

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most pleasing sight is Government House, set in its laid-out grounds and reached by an avenue of firs. Here is the tree under which Lobengula dispensed authority and from which his victims dangled before his gratified eyes. The house, itself, is Dutch and with its surroundings might have stepped bodily out of a Cape Town suburb. It is not in the least typical. No. Corrugated iron, red dust, and Matabele are much more typical of Bulawayo—Matabele in particular. The most favourable place to see them is in the beer-hall of the location, where they sit singing at the tables, free of restraint, drinking mugs of the pinky-white Kaffir beer. Being of an inquisitve nature, I asked many questions about this race. It seemed extraordinary to me, and it always will seem extraordinary, that they, an offshoot of the warlike Zulus and themselves but recently all-powerful and arrogant in this land, should so readily and easily have adapted themselves to present conditions. But the answer to my questions lay obviously in the riddle of national psychology and I found but few who had gone at all deeply into that. The study of phenomena, alone, is dangerous because you never know what other phenomena may emerge. At least, so I should imagine. A little book, published locally, *The Matabele at Home*, gives them a rather aimless character and they certainly do display a somewhat docile stupidity. But isn't that simply boredom? Amongst themselves they are animated and sarcastic. No race whose equivalent for "Thank you" ("*Unga dinwa nangomuso*") may be freely translated as "And to-morrow?" (or, shall we say, "Be not weary in well-doing") can be without shrewdness, and no race with so sovereign a language without dignity. If I were a native I should strongly object to having such names as "Milk," "Whisky," "Sixpence," or "Shilling" thrust upon me, but what are they to do? Let me relate a story. When I was staying at a certain place near Bulawayo the son of the

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house died. The old cook-boy, on hearing the news, thrice raised his hand above his head and thrice uttered in the deep tone of the Matabele the word "*'nKosi*" (Chief). A gesture so magnificent and so eloquent is not of recent growth, and if the younger men have now degenerated, who is to blame? We have taken from them what they valued more than the safety we have given and they have grown apathetic. I daresay they have all the vices with which public opinion credits them and it is obvious that now we are here we have got to be the masters, but I can never forget that we filched their country. Do they, then, forget it? Meanwhile they go dutifully about the streets, dressed in trousers and subservient to your looks, but cherishing, maybe, a full measure of hatred for you in their hearts. No white man in Rhodesia feels quite confident as to the future. . . .

One does not visit Bulawayo without visiting the Matopos, that singular outcrop of hills resembling a tumbled sea of bouldered kopjes some fifty miles long by twenty-five broad. It is but a mile or two within this range, on the summit of a huge granite kopje, at the spot named the World's View, that Cecil Rhodes is buried. It was a dramatic choice and it has fulfilled its purpose. In wild loneliness the country fades beneath you in silent convulsions, taking on at twilight especially the aspect of some outlandish moon-world. As you pause by the grave, big lizards, the colour of dull jade and lapis lazuli, dart in and out of the rock-crevices and make of the headstone, itself, a playground for their sportive fancies. About a hundred and fifty yards down the slope to the left stands a striking monument to the heroes of Shangani, who are buried beneath. But to bury them there at all was an error of imagination. Only one body should lie in this exalted sepulchre.

As you wind deeper into the passes of the Matapos the distorted rocks rise about you in ever more fantastic

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shapes—a nightmare of stone, an incredible freak of nature. In the valleys, themselves, little farms, few and far between, nestle cosily and their human warmth stirs in you with a very welcome relief. I stayed on one of these farms for a week and seldom has a week been fuller to me of the breath of the essential things. Its 6,000 acres were hemmed about by the hills and each evening the cattle would come streaming back to their kraal from their feeding haunts on the veld. Turkeys and hens strutted before the door and innumerable doves would rise from the reaped mealie-fields as you passed. Overhead the hawks soared and spiralled. I would often take a gun and, accompanied by half a dozen mongrel dogs, would beat up the tall reeds of the dried river-bed where the francolin and the quail loved to spend the hottest hours of the day. But if I were after buck I had to use wile and slip away unseen—the cheerful barking of small dogs made the most effectual warning and you could see the buck bounding far before you as happy as sand-boys. It was a rough life but a desirable one. I used to sit for hours on a pile of cobs watching the mealie-sheller at work, and there I got into conversation one day with an old Kaffir, who was anxious to flaunt a smattering of English and who asked me where my home was. On hearing the word England he seemed intensely amused. Of course I came from England—it only proved the correctness of his theory! He informed me that there was evidently plenty of food in England because there were evidently plenty of people there, but that there was no money in England because Englishmen had to come out to Rhodesia to make it. It was so obvious! . . . In the cool of the evening the farmer and I would stroll out to the new dam and, sitting upon its edge, would watch the fading of the hills. He would begin to speak to me of his hopes with a sort of concentrated quietude. Through the trials of the present he saw the slow completion of his

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toil, he saw the valley watered, full of cattle, he saw a new homestead, and all that makes life worth living to the single-hearted. I could have listened for hours to that voice whose level notes the enthusiasm would suddenly shake like a cornet-blast. Yes, I could have listened for hours while around us the primitive land, the land of his hopes, darkened and was blotted out.

A good motor-road (a rare thing in Rhodesia) runs the thirty odd miles from Bulawayo to the foot of the World's View, with a half-way hotel at the Dam, which was presided over in my time by an actor whose snatches of music-hall songs sounded divertingly petty in that place. But his trade was mostly with night-revellers from the town and may well have recalled to his mind the pleasant oyster-bars near Leicester Square. There is also a railway to the barrier of the Matopos, at the terminus of which another rustic hotel has been erected. Here I spent several weeks of an uneventful existence. On the verandah, facing the plain and the scattered kopjes of the border, the morning sun thrust back by inches the shadow of the roof, and the fields of green lucerne glowed ever more richly in the irrigated valley. I lunched with the family and of an afternoon would generally take an old borrowed gun and walk up into the stunted woods or to the kopjes where the dassies basked and the euphorbia trees grew between the stones. I never failed to put up duiker, steinbuck, or klipspringer and I never succeeded in shooting any. But to the alarmed cries of the go-away birds (a variety of plantain-eater) I would sit down by a stump and smoke and watch the life of the woods. Then I would trudge home, eat a hearty dinner, and go straight to bed. Thus did my days revolve, not without peace and yet not again without a kind of melancholy.

In the caves of the Matopos Bushmen drawings have been discovered and, indeed, their handiwork is

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to be found all over Rhodesia. This new land was the home of an ancient people and, besides the Bushmen, there were others whose more substantial evidences can be examined in such ruins as Zimbabwe and Khami. Authorities differ as to the origin and age of these ruins, but, whether they be Phœnician or Arab, certain it is that their builders came here after gold and that most of the present mines are the development of old workings. The subject of the ruins has been dealt with in various books and the curious should consult authorities like Bent and Hall. For myself I keep an open mind, which is always just as well when you know nothing about it, and, though I did once listen to a lecture on them for two and three-quarter hours, I came away feeling more bewildered than ever—almost as bewildered as the lecturer, I should say. No, when I read works on Rhodesia I prefer decidedly to read the annals of hunters and explorers, those annals which are, after all, the most worthy and typical written product of a land like this. Learnèd and foolish books on Rhodesia abound, but it is only a Selous, an Oates, or a Livingstone who can satisfy the traveller.

I had but newly arrived in Bulawayo when a friend asked me to spend a few days with him on his mine near Fort Rixon. I accepted, of course, and at about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon we started out of the town. The road was of appalling badness, but apparently a car can go anywhere and this one picked its way through sand-drifts and over rocks and by the virgin veld as if it had been a horse. It was my first experience of Rhodesia, and the great spaces, unhampered hereabout by scrub, affected me with a rare exhilaration. The real thing! The tufted grass waved over the crest of the far-rising ground like the immense wheatfields of Illinois or Manitoba. In this country long distance separates farm from farm and one hears of white men who, for twenty years, have

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lived amongst their natives with hardly a break. Such solitude works havoc, making a man suspicious, moody, ready to take offence. The craving for companionship remains, the capacity has gone, and in Rhodesia, at any rate, communion with nature results only in brooding mistrust. . . . Night overtook us on the veld in a place where there was no sign of a path, but my companion, with that instinct of the wilderness-dweller, caught up the trail like a nosing hound and brought us into Fort Rixon and so on to the road once more and up into the hills. Motoring at night has its own atmosphere in Rhodesia. Owls and night-jars flap up at your feet and the eyes of spring-hares and jackals glow like electric bulbs upon the road ahead. Buck stand motionless by the track in the blanched half-light of the lamps and the little true hares of the country (rabbit-like, grey animals) scuttle before you with raised ears. The passing car leaves behind it a wake of terror and fascination.

We reached the mine some half-hour after leaving Fort Rixon. I was very cold and thankful to warm myself before a blazing fire. From somewhere near the rattle of machinery could be heard distinctly, while a Kaffir, breathing heavily, made his appearance and began to lay the table. My friend's wife now came into the room, and after we had dined the three of us gathered round the fire and exchanged London reminiscences to the frail notes of a gramophone. I slept that night in one of those comfortable guest-huts, which are the Rhodesian equivalent of a spare bedroom, and, rising early in the morning, I found myself right up amongst a range of hills with the mine lying just below the house on the slope, and the native compound, with its brown huts upon their foundation of smoothed red earth, directly opposite on the further bank. A pergola of grenadillas protected one side of the garden, whose flower-beds gave a friendly aspect to the drear surroundings and seemed to light up the

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house itself. The grey works and buildings of the mine and the pale grey heap of tailings showed up well the black and ragged figures that were swarming in and out like ants. Supplies for isolated spots like this have to be brought many miles and it is no uncommon sight to see a span of sixteen donkeys or yoked oxen dragging a wagon-load of gear or wood over the veld. One was now approaching the mine, from which another was about to start forth. Indeed, the activities of such a place will never cease until that day on which they cease for good, when only its rotting carcase will speak to the chance wanderer of the disappointments and the dreams of gold.

That afternoon my friend and I motored ten miles to the Insiza and spent some hours shooting on its banks. But I will merge a description of this day in that of another shooting expedition made a few weeks later with the same friend (and others) to the same river. We had meant to camp out for two nights above it, but some of our party had lost their bearings and it was not till morn of the second day that we found ourselves by those "lands" of mealie and Kaffir corn where the guinea-fowl and the francolin like to feed. It was yet chill and the sun had but lately risen when we stopped the car and looked about us. In the middle of the field the guinea-fowl could be seen jumping to get at the ears and we had no sooner begun to walk them up than, with a swirl of wings, not less than five hundred game birds flew out in all directions. This is their usual habit and you must break up the packs before the birds will lie close and give you single shots. And so each taking our own boys we made off into the woods and were soon lost to sight. There is nothing comparable to that early walk with a gun! Brain and body are as one, there is no fatigue, and all the smells of the earth come fresh to you out of the night. Why, then, does this joy of life find such satisfaction in the idea of death? Tell me, is it

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instinct or is it egotism? I know how I exulted when my first two guinea-fowl fell to a clean right and left —but that proves nothing one way or the other. After all, what does prove anything? I'm not surprised at philosophers giving up the struggle and going over to pragmatism: it's like a Protestant joining the Church of Rome. No more trouble. . . . I shot buck, too, with my number 5's, even up to the size of a reed buck which weighs a full 150 lbs. How we walked that veld and doubled up and down the river! The report of our guns must have startled the Matabele for miles around. But those days have better things for me than the actual shooting memories. Once I emerged suddenly upon a tributary of the Insiza where a stony shelf divided a muddy crocodile pool from one of clear intensity shut in by rock. A kingfisher swept out from his nook and darted to and fro over the water and the reflection of the banks lay calm and still within the lucent depths. So lovely and unexpected a sight was it that I held my breath. In the winter drought of Rhodesia nearly all the pools are dry and the courses of the rivers are mere sandy beds: bore-holes, alone, will reveal the hidden treasure. But here was a pool fed as from some perennial spring of immaculate water reposing mirror-like in the trough of the deep and ledged rock. If I could but visit Rhodesia in summer when the veld is green, the wisteria in bloom, and all the streams are flowing!

The Kaffirs had prepared our camp and when we reached it we found most of our numerous party assembled. We did not shoot in the afternoon, but smoked at ease amidst the bustle of workers. The boys had already plucked a couple of the morning's guinea-fowl, which, roasted in an iron tripod, crackled in our mouths with the most delicious taste. But we had still much ground to cover and before twilight we sallied out once more and heard the game calling ere it went to roost and saw the buck upon

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the upland pastures. The francolin call, according to their varieties, after the manner of our English partridges or pheasants, but the good-night of the guinea-fowl is like a madman's chuckle. You might think that half Bedlam were hiding in the veld. Darkness gathered all too soon and not readily shall I forget our evening meal when the wide sea-like sunset of the plains had set and our only luminant came from the stars and the camp-fire. That night my rest was troubled but my memories were sweet. . . .

I had occasion to go to Salisbury once, the capital of Southern Rhodesia, but as I arrived there at seven in the morning and left at two the same afternoon I can say but little about it and, indeed, only mention it here for the sake of completeness. It seems to be a town of the size of Bulawayo, without Bulawayo's broad streets but surrounded by a more pleasing country. Stores, hotels, and the wives of Government Officials are much in evidence—and that's all I have to say about Salisbury. . . . Rolling bushveld and high grass accompany you from Matabeleland into Mashonaland. My journey was not altogether uneventful as we completely broke down, were thirteen hours late on the three hundred mile run, and had to spend an unlooked-for and bitter night in a foodless train. That is to say, it was officially foodless, being merely a goods train with some coaches attached, but I had been provided with a huge hamper from which I fed not only myself but a Dutch missionary from Nyasaland and a young married couple from Gatooma. The four of us (and a baby) straggled out of the train and sat down in the open bush to eat lettuces and bread-and-butter. The Dutchman and I discoursed long and earnestly upon the relative truths of predestination and of salvation through Faith alone, but when he asked me for my address in order to carry on with me a correspondence on the tenets of the English Church I evaded the request and begged him to

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describe to me the caves of Sinoia. Our lame duck of an engine had steamed slowly off for succour and the long, grey freight cars were lined up before our eyes like the vanguard of Europe's frantic lunacy. And late at night, when we had been able to move on a few miles, we got to some tin shanty, called an hotel, and cleaned them out of provisions. The only well-stocked department was the bar and the proprietor had discovered this before our arrival. He was his own best customer. . . . Forgive me if this be my last reminiscence of Southern Rhodesia.

THE END

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